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THE MISFIT CROWN

FRANCES DAVIDGE

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FROM THE BOOKS
IN THE HOMESTEAD OF

Sarah Orne Jewett

AT SOUTH BERWICK, MAINE

BEQUEATHED BY

Theodore Jewett Eastman

A.B. 1901 - M.D. 1905

1931

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BY

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D. APPLETON & COMPANY
NEW YORK MCMIV

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1931

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"He who can, does. He who cannot, teaches."

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BOOK ONE

FOUNDATIONS

I

MADAME MONTEDONICO

BOOK ONE

I

MADAME MONTEDONICO

"No, my dear Lady Carnifex," said John Ashburton, sipping his tea slowly, and standing with his thin, tall figure sharply outlined in the blazing fire-light, "she must be clever, this Madame Montedonico."

Lady Carnifex, an elegant, slightly faded little woman, with a perfect figure and bejeweled hands, which flashed as they moved over the tea-service in front of her, looked thoughtfully into the fire before she replied.

"I suppose she is clever," she said meditatively, "because she does her hair so badly."

"Oh, fallacy of woman! You might conclude, then, that I am a fool because I don't wear ill-fitting clothes."

Lady Carnifex shook her head. "I always

said that being in such demand for house-parties would spoil you," she continued, "and so it will. You're getting vain, or you've gotten vain, or you'll get vain. It's all the same in the end. But I like you better than any man I know, all the same, except when you talk too much. That's one reason I married Sir Rufus. He's so comfortably silent. And then I did think that Caroline Carnifex—C. C. —would make such a pretty monogram for my handkerchiefs."

John Ashburton laughed. He was very charming when he laughed, people thought. His keen gray eyes twinkled behind his eyeglasses, and he threw back his head with a very evident enjoyment. Lady Carnifex always amused him, and he had been wise enough to let her think that it was what she said—and not what she was—that afforded the amusement.

"But to go back to Madame Montedonico," he said. "Do you remember Alice in Wonderland? She is not untidy because she is

clever, nor clever because she is untidy. In spite of my thinking the back of her head—which is all I have seen of her—interesting, she is heavily handicapped, I hear. Tom tells me she is poor. Her face and rumor say she has had a history. You claim she fixes her hair badly. Unfortunate woman!"

"I think histories are awfully interesting, myself, and I should rather like to try living in a sweet little cottage with only two or three maids; but what I could not stand would be an untidy head, and the old Countess of Marweir for my mother," and Lady Carnifex shivered. "One of the Marweirs of Rivaston, you know. She's simply impossible, that old woman. My mother would never even call on her. She dyes her hair, and there's been every sort of story about her. The children were like her, I expect—all except Madame Montedonico."

Mr. Ashburton wrinkled his brow for a moment. "Lady Marweir—Lady Marweir! I don't seem to place her."

"Well, if you'd once seen her it would be easy enough. Since the old earl's death she knocks about the Continent, or invites herself to stop with people at home, and forgets to fee the servants when she leaves. Her children don't get on with her. One of her sons was the famous Viscount Blye."

"The Viscount Blye who drank?"

"The Viscount Blye who drank. He was an awful man, and pretended to be in love with me. But Madame Montedonico is a sort of family contradiction. She ran away with this Italian, Leone Montedonico, and had no smart wedding, or presents. And then, when the child was two or three years old, the Italian ran away in his turn and has never been heard of since. And she's never had any flirtations or anything, but has just economised and made the girl's clothes. They say she came to Carley Weir because it was cheap. She certainly wouldn't have come if she'd wanted gaiety," and the little lady shook her head resignedly.

"My dear lady, if you wanted a pretty

monogram on your handkerchiefs, you had to take Sir Rufus's country tastes too!"

"Oh, I know! Only it has been fearfully boring. To marry a country magnate is to kill oneself for the world, I always say—just like becoming mayor of Liverpool or living in the suburbs, don't you know. If it weren't for you and the doctor, I am sure I would have to give up even dinners. You're both celebrities, even in town. I think it must be awfully nice to be famous. My boy Rufus is going to be famous, I suppose."

"I haven't seen Rufus since he was a mere lad. How is he going to shine?"

Lady Carnifex sighed. "He won't shine. Shining is too attractive and brilliant. He will just do some solidly good, stupid work, Rufus. He's trying to write, you know. Now Geoffry went through his two or three London seasons and didn't get himself tangled up with any girl, though he is so good-looking, and has wandered about the world generally—and done nothing. Yet I'm sure he's far

more likely to be attractively famous than Rufus."

"One of them may marry Madame Montedonico's daughter."

"That's why I want to find out about them. I haven't seen them yet, since we came back from Scotland, but the boys were here all summer, you know, and they made friends with the girl. Maud Fitzgerald's met her at the Vicar's, and she says she is simply stunning. Think of my grandchildren having old Lady Marweir for a great-grandmother! Oh, dear!"

"When I had my glimpse of the mother, in church last Sunday, I saw the daughter, too," said John Ashburton. "She is very handsome, but too tall—and about twenty, I should say. Madame Montedonico herself can not be more than forty-one or two, yet she is almost bent, and looks tragic. In fact"—he set down his tea-cup—"she is a personality."

"Oh, well, she sounds rather queer, and she's some one new, at any rate. I think I shall call

on her, or ask her to dinner. We are going to have these people Saturday week, and Maud Fitzgerald has given out. For heaven's sake, don't forget you're coming! All the other men talk about their pigs or their chickens."

John Ashburton smiled. "I should like to take Madame Montedonico in, if she comes," he remarked. "She interests me."

Two other men were approaching them from the far end of the low, country-house room. Both were in riding-dress. The one, short, stout, with a head already white and a face which wind and rain had reddened, was Sir Rufus Carnifex, master of Carley House, a striking contrast to his pretty, rather faded little wife. The other, Dr. Thomas Ashburton, the celebrated surgeon, was a less intensified imitation of his spare, tall brother. His fame of the operating-room was one thing; his fame of personality was but reflected. He was the brother of his brother—that was enough. Never a man who cared for society in its worldly sense, he was yet one who kept up his

intercourse with worldly things, chiefly from an observant turn of mind, and who laughed, quietly, as he saw how he bored most people, and how infinitely his brother John amused them.

John Ashburton was then in his forty-eighth year, but he looked far older. He was a man whose charm many people had tried to analyse. Women sighed, and said he had a past. Men liked him to come to dinner, and said it was a cursed shame he did not consent to have a future. He had never, in all his life, antagonised any one, and only one person had succeeded in antagonising him—and that was a woman whose judgment of him was harsh, and for whose opinion he had cared. A life of clubs and tea-tables, with enough money to dress perfectly and to amuse himself now and again at Monte Carlo, had drifted easily along. "My cynicism," he once said to his mother, from whom he got his cleverness, "is growing with my baldness."

"And when you are quite bald, my dear

Jack," returned the old lady smartly, "you will have outlived your disillusions—and then it will be too late."

John was very apt to run down, between house-parties, to visit his bachelor doctor brother, in his quiet retreat at Carley Weir, whither the great surgeon repaired to rest, and to read and hunt. The Carnifexes being the only other civilised folk within a good radius, the brothers often rode over to tea, and to share the latest county gossip with Lady Carnifex.

Dr. Thomas caught his brother's last words as he and his host neared the fireside.

"Madame Montedonico?—take her into dinner?—and where, Jack?" he asked curiously. He spoke in a strong, quiet voice, which was his greatest contrast to the quick, changing tones of his younger brother. Some one had once called the characters of the two "talk and taciturnity." The one told nothing; the other told everything, and left people to sift out the truth from the chaff.

"Why, here," answered John Ashburton, opening his cigarette-case. "May I, Lady Carnifex? Thanks, so much. The truth is that our lady here has discovered Madame Montedonico, and that Maud Fitzgerald has very thoughtfully given out for Saturday week. You, dear Tom, are not asked, by the way. I have my invitation safe in my engagement-book. And if my hostess is mercifully inclined, she will let me take Madame Montedonico in to dinner."

"I don't know why the deuce you should call on her, Carrie, much less ask her to dinner," said Sir Rufus crossly.

Lady Carnifex shook her head.

"I've been a martyr to you and the boys always, Rufus," she said. "Here they want me to make friends with the girl and her mother, and you don't. I can't help it if they *are* queer. Mr. Ashburton says the woman doesn't make up. I'm sure I don't know why you're so unreasonable."

"I can tell you about Madame Montedonico,

since I know her," broke in the doctor. "I spent my summer holidays here this year, you see, when you people were all taking cures for diseases you have not got. She consulted me professionally first, and I have come to know her quite well."

"*Does* she make up?" asked Lady Carnifex cautiously.

Dr. Ashburton smiled. "My dear Lady Carnifex, she cares far less about her appearance than the simplest villager in Carley Weir. She is a very miserable woman, except for her daughter. Remember that her life has been a most tragic failure. No, she does not make up."

"It is just that kind that always do; and, what's worse, they succeed in making men think they don't. At any rate, I shall ask her to dinner, in spite of Rufus and her untidiness and everything. It's really fearfully bad form to have a past."

"When it ends in untidiness, it certainly is," said John Ashburton. "On the contrary, I

have a past, and I am not generally considered bad form."

"Well," said Lady Carnifex dubiously, "you didn't care much about her, or you wouldn't admit that you had a past at all. I think life's awfully queer, myself. It's so full of contradictions. So many people look like Agamemnon or Anchises, or whoever it was led her father around the world for so many years, in Greek history, and was so fearfully tragic —and underneath they're having the silliest flirtations and always changing their cooks. Then so many women spend thousands on their clothes, and always look as if they dressed in the left-overs of a summer sale. And the people whom you think talk most really say least."

"I don't see what on earth talking is, then," grumbled Sir Rufus sleepily.

"Clever talking," said Dr. Ashburton, picking up his crop, "is, I should say, the knack of making people surprised when you say something stupid."

"And the cleverest talking, I should say," his brother retorted, smiling, "is—listening. What, Tom, are the horses here? Well, good-by, dear lady. Your tea's the best I know. Chinese, isn't it?"

"Carley will be terribly stupid till you come again," said Lady Carnifex, gloomily. "I wonder why you are so amusing?"

"For heaven's sake, don't call me funny!" protested John hastily. "That is the last insult to a self-respecting man. I'm not really amusing, Lady Carnifex. There's a great deal in reputation, you know."

"Know? I should think I did! Every one thinks my hair is naturally wavy, and on the strength of that I only have it curled twice a week!"

Sir Rufus saw them off from the doorway. The two brothers mounted, with a biting October wind, fresh with sea-salt, blowing in their faces. Autumn had come early, and the evenings were apt to be cold and rainy.

"Gad, it's blowing on the moor!" exclaimed

Sir Rufus, striking the doctor's horse with his rough palm. "Nice horses of yours, doctor. By the way"—he lowered his voice—"you know this woman better than any one else here—this Madame what's her name, I mean. Can Carrie really call on her, do you think? Is she—is she all right?"

The doctor straightened in his saddle and looked down into the bluff face beside him. "All right?" he said. "Oh, I see. Yes, my dear fellow, she's all right. But she won't come to dine with you. Good night."

The brothers were silent until they passed the lodge-gates of Carley House and struck out on the long, flat stretch of moorland. Here the mist changed into a driving rain, and the wind beat heavily against them. The gray darkness grew, and the mystery of a stormy night fell over the moor. Once John Ashburton drew rein to pull his collar about his ears and to swear, in his gentle voice, at his tailor's cutting, in the act.

"We shall have blustering weather," said the doctor shortly.

"But I came down to be bored, my dear Tom. Don't try to arrange croquet parties for me, and apologise for the weather. I'm too old. Besides which, there is always Carrie Carnifex. She is one of the most enchanting people I know. I tried to write a book once, with her contradictious little character for my sole material."

"Her view of things is certainly amusing," admitted the doctor.

"I often wonder if fate will some day be cruel enough to make her realise how funny she is, and so spoil it all. She has the most remarkable instinct for hitting nails on their heads. You and I work around to a point by reason and sense, and she jumps gaily over terrible spaces of illogicity, and lands comfortably in the right place, right side up." He laughed. "And now, if you please, I should very much like to hear something about this

Madame Montedonico. The glimpse of her which I got was an oasis in the desert of Carley Weir church. I want to know more of her. She is one of the most interesting looking women I have ever seen."

The doctor sighed. "It is a tragic case, Jack. Every one in the village has guessed the state of things, so I'm telling you no secret. Three months ago, when I came down as usual, I found this woman established in a cottage at Carley Weir. One day she met me in the village, and asked me frankly if I were Dr. Ashburton. She told me her name, and said I had it in my power to render her a great service—simply this: she wished me to give her a professional opinion as to how long she could live. She has a fatal disease." He covered his eyes with his hands for a moment. "I went to see her, and examined her. She can not possibly last more than five or six months. There is, and has been—and, God help her, will be—terrible suffering, which she is bearing most nobly. In all my profes-

sional experience I have never seen anything finer."

"And her daughter?"

"The daughter is the problem. She is very young—barely twenty—and unusually beautiful. After my first visit I went to see them often, to give the mother what advice I could and to help her think for the future. Reticent woman as she is, she told me her plans and hopes for her child. Leonida is to go, it seems, to the old Countess of Marweir, her grandmother."

"Of whom rumor saith much!"

"I know, my dear Jack; but what else is to be done? She is the girl's only relative. Her father, scoundrel that he is, is probably dead by now."

John Ashburton was interested with an interest unusual in him. "What is the child's name, do you say?" he asked.

"Leonida. Italian, you see. She is a curious girl, with a great, warm heart, which has only waked up where her mother is concerned.

She is fiery and passionate and uncontrolled, now. She will never make iron, but she may mold herself into tempered steel."

"How intelligent it would be of chance to make one of those Carnifex boys fall in love with her!" said John pensively. "If they were much together during the summer, it may not be impossible."

The doctor smiled. "But I'm afraid it is, as things look now. Rufus seems to bore her stiff, and Geoffry—by far the more likely one of the two—is on terms of the most healthy friendship with her."

"A friendship between a young man as good-looking as every one says Geoffry Carnifex is, and a handsome girl in a romantic position, is abnormal if it *is* healthy, my dear fellow. Oh, I know the symptoms. Wait, I will tell you. They call each other by their first names, have some special hobby in common, and are hilariously frank about their relationship."

"Exactly!"

"Heaven help them, then, poor children. One of them will fall helplessly in love, and the other won't respond. That is one of the few states in life which makes me kick—despite my gray hairs and my wisdom of years, which tells me that the kicking doesn't even dent fate's obstinacy, and only exhausts me. It is such a lopsided, badly balanced, undignified situation. The one who loves gives so pitifully much, and receives so pitifully little; and the other can't help looking supercilious, if it's a woman, or caddish, if it's a man."

"If Leonida Montedonico," said Dr. Ashburton slowly, "should fall in love in the wrong quarter it would be dangerous."

They were coming to the first houses of Carley Weir. Lights twinkled, blurred and yellow, through the rain, and a sense of cheer crept out into the desolate darkness.

"There," went on the doctor, after a moment's pause, pointing with his whip to a shaft of light a little above the long village street, "is their house. It overlooks the ocean, you

see, and the people here call it The Cottage—why, I don't know."

"It probably is more cottagy—has more potted geraniums and fewer comforts—than the rest. Your story interests me, Tom. And that little fool, Carrie Carnifex, wanted such a woman for dinner! But you must take me to see her. Friends always help."

The doctor drew rein suddenly in the darkness. "I want to know how she is sleeping, by the way. Turn off to the right, Jack, and we will stop there for a moment now. She will not mind my bringing you."

It was characteristic of John Ashburton that he smoothed his rumpled hair and wiped the damp carefully from his spotless linen as they stood in the tiny porch of Carley Weir cottage. One could see vaguely that the house overlooked an extensive view of the village, just below it, and of the moor and sea beyond. A garden lay to one side, and one smelt, through the night, the wet scent of the late roses.

In response to the doctor's knock the door was opened by a neat little maid, and they made their way into the narrow hall. The ladies were in the sitting-room, she said; and she ushered them in at once.

It was the room of the ordinary English cottage, long and low, with heavy beams and prettily wainscoted walls. An indefinable atmosphere of individuality and taste hung about it. There were no accompaniments of invalidism, John Ashburton quickly noticed; no pillows, no scent-bottles, no superfluous shawls. Neither in the woman in the low chair by the fireside were there outward signs of suffering; but only—and it was an indefinable atmosphere too—of a great pain conquered. Catherine Montedonico was one of those women whom, once having known, one never forgets. She lived herself into her companions and her surroundings to such a degree that her individuality was almost ineffaceable. Never beautiful, her face yet had the beauty of those who have lived, and lived nobly.

There was, too, in her eyes, and in the firm lines of her chin, the strength of those who have fought down the past, having no hope for the future. John Ashburton was a man who observed quickly, and he saw at once that here was a woman different from—the rest.

She held out her hand to both men, and spoke, in a voice which was cold and well modulated, choosing her words carefully and slowly. It was perhaps the only outward sign in her that her whole life had been a victory of self-control. Then she turned to the other side of the fireplace from which she sat.

"Mr. Ashburton," she said, "while I talk with your brother, Leonida can make friends with you. This is my daughter."

The girl was standing in the shadow of the heavy mantel, holding awkwardly a heavy, yellow-covered book. She was immensely tall —too tall, John Ashburton saw at once; and her dark eyes were frightened and shy. As she moved forward into the fire-light he could

see, however, that she was marvelously handsome. Her straight, lithe figure carried a small head, full of delicate spirit. Her hair was soft and glossy; her skin almost showed the blue veins beneath. She was all trembling, nervous energy, like a beautiful horse set to run the race of life. She was dressed very simply in pure white, save for a little ribbon of pale blue velvet tied about her slim young throat.

"How do you do?" she began nervously. "Mother likes the sofa, so perhaps you will sit by me here. You have only just come down to Devon, haven't you? I saw you in the village the other day, but you didn't see me."

Mr. Ashburton kept his keen, smiling eyes upon her, as he seated himself and heard his brother and Madame Montedonico begin to talk in low tones at the other end of the room.

"Did you see me?" he remarked. "I am very sorry that I missed seeing you."

She glanced at him for a moment, and then

she began to laugh. Her shyness was disappearing.

"Do you know from where I saw you?" she asked. "From the gutter! I found a little boy sailing a toy boat there, and I stopped to try to sail one too. Only think, if I had first met you—in the gutter!"

Again her laugh rang out, an infectious, merry laugh, which echoed itself in her eyes.

"I am rather used to the gutter myself," said John Ashburton, smiling back at her. "Some of the nicest people I know live there. Tell me, what is your book?"

Leonida grew grave suddenly. "I am reading it to mother," she explained. "It is the Vie de Jésus, by Renan. Perhaps"—she hesitated—"perhaps you don't——"

"Oh, yes, I do," he returned, taking the volume from her. "So you and your mother read these books together, do you?"

"Yes, we read together all the time, mother and I." Her smile was very tender as she looked over to the other end of the room.

"You see, we're best friends. Were you best friends with your mother?" There was a confidential frankness in her manner which was very winning.

"My dear young lady," he protested, "I never knew my mother."

Leonida's eyes grew round. "How awful!" she exclaimed. "What did she die of?"

Again John Ashburton laughed. "She is a most lively person, thank you, still—and a very modern one. At eighty-four she still finds me boresome. She lives with my sister in Kent, and has never yet condescended to make friends with her children."

Leonida rested her chin on her hand and looked at him gravely.

"I think," she said slowly, "that you are what is called a cynic."

John shrugged his thin shoulders. "Perhaps."

"Tell me," went on Leonida, with rapt interest, "do tell me what you think makes a cynic? I've always wanted to know."

"Life!"

"But every one isn't cynical," she objected.

He laughed shortly. "The cup of life, most wise young lady, is bitter to some of us, sweet to others. Say one has drained a little of its contents, and something sour creeps in; the remainder is all permeated, and one must try not to make too wry a face in finishing it. That is all."

She turned away and looked into the fire. "So it's just a chance whether the bitter or the sweet is the stronger?"

"Just a chance."

"Don't you think, though, that the sweet would have a rather better chance if we looked for it, and expected it, and forgot about the bitter?"

John Ashburton did not answer.

Leonida drew her chair nearer his, and dropped her voice to its confidential tone. "I'll tell you why it seems to me possible," she explained eagerly. "Now, I'm really *frightfully* fond of sugar, and whenever I have to

take an especially nasty medicine, I always put a piece of sugar in front of me, and in thinking how good it's going to be I almost forget the bad taste of the medicine."

There was another pause. Then John shook himself a little.

"Do you like walking?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh, I simply adore it!" said Leonida, enthusiastically, forgetting cynicism in a flash. "The walks here are too lovely. Do you know them?"

"Not well. I was about to ask you to pilot me on some of them."

Leonida sprang up and rushed across the room.

"Mother, may I?" she cried. "May I go to walk with Mr. Ashburton?"

The doctor had risen to go, and he slipped his hand into the girl's and drew her to him, with his quiet smile. Madame Montedonico looked thoughtfully at John Ashburton as she gave him her hand.

"Do you really want her?" she said. "It is

very kind of you, and she will go with pleasure; but do not let her tire you."

John smiled.

"She will not tire me, your daughter," he replied; "she interests me."

"She is very young," said Catherine Montedonico slowly. "At present her ideas are a set of italicised enthusiasms. But, in a certain way, she is not immature. She will develop."

"We all develop until the last, madame."

She smiled her grave, quiet smile.

"And there is never any last with development," she said.

A few moments, and the brothers were out in the dark night again. They rode on through the village, toward the doctor's house, in silence. John Ashburton was thinking deeply of the short scene in the cottage behind them.

"Life," he remarked suddenly, "is very full of contrasts."

"Yes."

"For instance, Carrie Carnifex and that woman."

The other brother half turned in his saddle, and smiled.

"And for instance again, you and Leonida, Jack," he said.

II

CONTRASTS

II

CONTRASTS

JOHN ASHBURTON had always said of himself that he knew too much; and had said it with a persistency which showed that, in his heart of hearts, he knew that he knew too little.

He had met very few people in his life as clever as he; so that when he was often thought vain, he was in reality only bored. In his way he was a narrow man. People, collectively, wearied him to extinction; individually, they might interest him intensely. He might have been said to be an observer without being observant. When he wanted to, he could sift and separate the finest shades of a nature, and judge them with a cleverness worthy of himself; but, as a general rule, the mass of humanity was, to him, a background. This intellectual egoism, where his point of

view was concerned, had come from indifference in his youth, and was fast merging into laziness in his middle age.

He smiled carelessly as he opened the gate of Madame Montedonico's garden, a few days after his introduction to her. Perhaps the very contradiction of his taking a girl of nineteen to walk appealed to him. The smile, however, was caused by his own vexation at seeing two horses held, at the gate, by the Carnifex groom. Some one was in the field before him.

He entered the cottage sitting-room, bright with the brilliant morning sunshine. Madame Montedonico was seated at her desk, writing. Beside her, resting one hand on the table and fingering his cap nervously with the other, stood Rufus Carnifex, elder son and heir, to whom one day would devolve the great property of Carley House. Ashburton had not seen young Rufus since some years before, when he had been a pale, sickly lad. Now, at twenty-eight, he was much unchanged. Too

small in stature, with an air of inconsequence which went against him, his face was yet very handsome—dark and thoughtful in expression, sensitive in its outlines, but with a seriousness which somehow failed to be interesting and degenerated into being cross.

Madame Montedonico greeted her new visitor and asked leave to finish the note she was writing.

"It is for Mr. Carnifex to take to Carley House," she explained. "Leonida and Mr. Geoffry have gone into our meadow back here to do some veterinary work."

John Ashburton shook hands with Rufus.

"I have not seen you for a long time," he said, moving courteously away from the writing table, in order to let Madame Montedonico be undisturbed. "How are you?"

"I am quite well, thank you, Mr. Ashburton—far stronger than I used to be."

"And your brother?"

"Geoffry is always well. He will be here in a moment—his horse is waiting with mine.

Yes, he is always well. I think he has all a strong man's misunderstanding and intolerance of illness."

Rufus was unmistakably nervous and preoccupied. He kept his eyes fixed on a window of the room which looked out over the meadow of which Madame Montedonico had just spoken.

"Yet I have often seen the strongest men most tender," called Madame Montedonico from her desk, as her pen flew on.

Rufus turned from the window with an evident effort.

"Yes, Madame Montedonico, that is quite true. But I don't think that any one who has not actually suffered physically can really understand pain. One must have the smart in order to have the sympathy." He sighed. "However, Mr. Ashburton, I must tell you of a new interest that has lately come to me. I am writing a book."

"Ah, that *is* interesting! And when is it to appear?"

Rufus smiled. "Well, you see, the publication will be a comparatively secondary matter. The point is the labor and research. My object is to prove the retrogression of modern Christianity. The amount of study involved is, of course, immense, and has absorbed me almost more than the actual writing."

"It must indeed be tremendous," responded John politely. He was trying not to yawn, and wondering why Leonida and Geoffry were so long. "Yes, I believe your mother did mention the fact of your becoming literary when I last saw her."

"My people are not altogether in touch with me mentally, I am sorry to say. They don't seem to understand the wonderful fascination of study. You see, it is not, vulgarly speaking, that I am *becoming literary.* I am simply trying to prove——"

Madame Montedonico came forward at that moment, with her letter in her hand. Possibly she caught the expression of John Ashburton's face, for she interrupted Rufus ruthlessly.

"Here is the note, Mr. Carnifex, and I am very penitent for having kept you waiting. Please tell your mother how sorry I am. Lady Carnifex"—she turned to John—"very kindly sent to ask me to dine with her, but I am unable to go anywhere just now. Ah, here come your brother and Leonida."

There was a sound of an opening door, a ring of laughter, a heavy tread and a light one, and Leonida and her companion entered the room.

A greater contrast to his elder brother than Geoffry Carnifex could scarcely be imagined. Physically, he was the most superb type of Anglo-Saxon—a good six foot four, tremendously broad, with tow-colored hair and frank blue eyes. He had played every conceivable game, and won it; he had ridden from his babyhood. At Eton he had only been less popular than at Oxford. His face had none of the sensitiveness of Rufus's; he was built of totally different clay. Honesty and a good heart were synonymous with Geoffry's small-

est action; his big, well-shaped hands had a quick, sure way of moving. The pride of his father and mother, he had stayed unspoiled, protected by the all-permeating sunniness of a happy nature. If but a few people had loved him he might have tried to exercise his charm, and so tainted it. As it was, his universal popularity seemed to him but a phase of the general big-heartedness of the world—a phase as natural as the fresh air and the sunshine.

Yet Geoffry, John Ashburton remembered hearing, had not been without his experiences. He was not simply a strong, undeveloped animal. He had traveled widely, hunted for big game in Africa, helped one or two men out of tight places, had mild flirtations with several pretty girls. Perhaps it was almost dangerous that he had never made an enemy. Yet great and small alike never looked into those clear blue eyes without instinctively feeling that this was a gentleman, with clean hands and unsullied honor.

Leonida, tall as she was, was not tall beside him. The wind had ruffled her hair a little, and there was a clear pink in her cheeks. John saw that she wore her simple serge dress with a knack of *bien mise-té* which belongs only to those with Latin blood. He noticed again, too, the little line of blue velvet about her throat.

She greeted him with a touch of shyness.

"Yes, indeed, it is very kind of you to remember our walk. I shall be ready as soon as—in a moment, that is—if mother will let me—" She caught suddenly what Geoffry was saying to her mother. "Oh, mother, *if* you could see the puppy! He's too darling! And Mr. Carnifex has fitted the nicest little splint to his leg."

Madame Montedonico smiled at John. "Leonida found a forsaken dog in the village yesterday, and it appears that his leg was broken. I did not know we had a veterinary at Carley Weir."

Geoffry grew red, and laughed frankly.

"Oh, I'm an awfully bad hand at it! Your daughter's a good nurse, you see. It's nice to have you down again, Mr. Ashburton. What do you say to a ride across to Porlock before breakfast some morning? And how's the doctor off for horses just now? I'll send over one of my ponies, if you like."

"Thanks, Tom is well fixed. Yes, I'm glad to see you again, Geoffry. The next meet is to-morrow, isn't it?"

"Yes. I'll stop for you in the morning, say at nine o'clock. Will that suit you, Rufus?"

"I shall not be riding to-morrow," said Rufus. "I have a great accumulation of work before me. Come, Geoffry, we must go. Mr. Ashburton is waiting to take Miss Montedonico to walk."

Leonida crossed the room suddenly, and held out her hand to Rufus.

"How is the book?" she asked.

"You are very kind to ask about it," he answered, smiling, "and it will go on better for your having done so. It and I are

very well indeed, thank you. Are you ready, Geoffry?"

A moment later the two brothers galloped away in the sunshine, Rufus riding with a precise care, Geoffry singing the latest music-hall song, with his cap off and the wind blowing through his yellow hair.

John Ashburton and Madame Montedonico watched them from the garden gate, while they waited for Leonida to fetch her hat.

"What a contrast those two are!" said Madame Montedonico thoughtfully.

"Yes. And as there will always be a contrast, there will always be a comparison."

"And there being a comparison, Rufus is sure to suffer. Yet he has fine points, Mr. Ashburton. His lack of physical strength seems to have given him an almost feminine sympathy. I—I myself am not very well just now; and there is no one who is kinder or more understanding than Rufus Carnifex about sparing me small fatigues and bringing me small comforts. He interests me—but I

like Geoffry. They have been here all summer, you see, while their mother and father were away; and Leonida has made friends with them. I have not yet met Lady Carnifex."

"I am sorry you will not dine there. I hoped to have the pleasure of taking you in."

Madame Montedonico smiled, a little sadly, as she turned to Leonida, who was approaching from the cottage.

"It is not a case of *will* not, but *can* not," she responded. "Leonida, dear, don't call on Mr. Ashburton's kindness too long."

"I wonder," said Leonida meditatively, as she and John paused at the end of the village street, "what sort of things you like best?"

John laughed. "My principle is never to go to extremes one way or the other. Except chipped beef, which I love, and garden parties, which I abhor, my emotions are very normal."

"I am going to take you by a path right

across the moor, then. One can see the ocean beyond, and if you care for views, you can make out Porlock Bay from the top of that far hill. Why don't you like garden parties? I think they are too lovely."

"So did I, when I was your age, my dear young lady. It is all point of view, you know. For instance, you can wear a becoming hat and amuse yourself with tantalising all the young men of the neighborhood, while I have to cart food around and keep up a somewhat threadbare reputation for charm. And that is very wearing."

Leonida glanced at him from under her long lashes. "Do you think I have charm?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes," said John Ashburton, smiling a little pensively, "I do. But there are two sorts of charm. Yours is young, and lives in the present, and would be spoiled by self-consciousness. Mine is so mature that it is fast becoming stale. It lives on the past, and needs

the most careful handling to make it work at all. All things are mere matters of comparison, you see. I hope you have brought a pencil and paper to write out the words of wisdom I am giving vent to."

They were silent for a minute as they trudged along.

"What subjects do you talk most confidentially about?" asked Leonida presently.

John thought for a moment. "Toothaches. Whenever I sit next a woman at dinner to whom I feel inexplicably drawn, I know at once that she has had the peculiar form of toothache from which I suffer. Some day I mean to write a series of articles, in collaboration with my best friends, called Tooth to Tooth Talks. Tell me, what subjects touch your innermost heart most nearly?"

"I think love is the most interesting thing in the world," said Leonida gravely. "I mean what it makes people do and what it makes them suffer. I like to read about it, but not

to talk about it. It is always like touching a beautiful piece of clean linen with dirty hands, isn't it?"

"I do not think I agree with you there. I don't hold that familiarity breeds contempt. Shutting oneself up in one's mental shell is an inevitable stage with all of us, yet I believe it is a harmful one. And love lasts such a little while that I think it is a good plan to 'blow' about it, as the small boys say, while one has it. I know no more inspiring sight than a young man and woman on the top of a Putney 'bus, on Sunday afternoon, gazing rapturously at each other and radiating the banns of their approaching nuptials."

Leonida laughed. "When are you serious?" she asked.

"Very seldom. One invariably bores other people and oneself, too, when one is serious. It is almost as bad as being invariably funny. Then there is a great deal in knowing one's bent. For instance, it does not become me to be learned, and it does become Rufus Carni-

fex." He looked at her sharply. "Do you see?"

Her face grew grave. "But don't you give Rufus's work more weight than that of a mere fad?" she said thoughtfully. "I do. I quite admit that I don't even begin to understand what he is trying to prove; but the amount he has accomplished is really wonderful. While most men in his position would be idling away their time and their money, Rufus has started out, with a splendid purpose, to make his mind worth something. I admire what he is doing very much."

"The world's judgment, my dear young lady, is harder than yours. It will not pass sentence so much on what he does as on the way he does it; it will not read his book, but it will say that writing has made him uninteresting."

"Well, I think Rufus is rather interesting, all the same."

"I beg leave to differ. Rufus will never be interesting until he learns how to be silly."

This time Leonida acquiesced. "Yes, I sometimes wish he would be more foolish—like Geoffry. But, serious or foolish, they are awfully nice, both of them, aren't they?"

John cut at a tuft of late heather with his stick. "The art of being silly is a great talent," he observed. "It is also a cloak which covers a multitude of secrets. Personally, I do not possess it—except unconsciously, when I am flattering myself that I am being interesting. Intentional silliness is a talent just as much as unintentional silliness is a bore."

"But I think gravity is just as beautiful, in its way," said Leonida, smiling.

"I don't. Gravity is, to me, like a winter landscape—one of those things which I always have to remind myself to admire. For instance, we are becoming grave now—let us be silly!"

But Leonida was obstinately silent for a few moments. She had a very flattering little way of weighing one's remarks and giving

them far more worth than their due. Finally she said:

"How neatly you have sifted things and pigeonholed them! I admire that very much. Do you know, my mind is just like my top bureau drawer—gloves, ribbons, handkerchiefs, all bundled together!"

"Don't try to become a mental housecleaner before you naturally feel the need of being one," answered John. "All through your life you will find that a law applies to us as soon as it seems natural and right, and not before. My own standard has for years been spontaneity. As soon as I have to *remind* myself to be polite, or to like a person, or to wash my hands often, I know that I am degenerating morally, and need a general shaking up. It is a very leveling standard, mine, I assure you. For example, for many years I used to be abnormally vain, till one fine day I discovered that my admiration of myself was not spontaneous, but forced, and in that blessed

moment I saw that my doll was stuffed with sawdust."

Leonida stopped short and looked at him suspiciously. "I think," she observed slowly, "that you are being silly now."

John burst out laughing.

"You are a very clever young woman," he said.

She talked to him long about her mother that morning, and he realised how deep the stamp of Catherine Montedonico's personality was on that young life. Her mother had never been strong, Leonida admitted, a little wistfully. She looked very delicate now, did she not? John winced, and was silent.

"I feel sure, though," Leonida continued, with the suspicion of a quiver in her voice, "that she will improve here. The air is so splendid; and your brother has been so kind. She tries to do too much, that is one trouble. She will not let me take a single burden off her shoulders. She says it will all come soon

enough." She sighed. "Did you ever see any one quite like my mother, Mr. Ashburton?"

"No," said John gently.

"And she was so beautiful until just a few years ago! Before her hair turned gray, you know. But her eyes and her smile—they have never changed. She has the loveliest smile in the world, I think. It is always a little graver than other people's smiles, and makes one feel that she has had less to smile at than most of the world."

John instinctively tried to change the subject.

"I hope you and your mother will like Lady Carnifex," he said. "She is a charming little woman, and very good-hearted. Sir Rufus, too, is quite a type. What a handsome fellow Geoffry has grown to be!"

He had slipped the remark in adroitly, but the color never wavered on her face as she answered:

"Oh, Geoffry is splendid! There is nothing

he can't do. And then he is such a healthy, happy person. I do wish that, in a way, Rufus were more like him."

"Rufus seems to make the mistake of thinking that people want to be instructed," said John. "Some day, when he has really lived, he will realise that people only want to be amused."

"He may not amuse us," repeated Leonida obstinately, "but his life will be worth more than ours, all the same. He is going to do good work some day, Rufus." She smiled suddenly. "But his beliefs *are* curious. He is trying to convert me to his way of thinking, and lends me the most gruesome things to read. Religion is the main point of life to him."

John laughed in his turn. "Why does he not learn that our religion does not make our lives, but that our lives make our religion?"

"I know," said Leonida eagerly. "That is just what mother says. She thinks that by

spending so much time defining religion, and proving unlikely things to be humanly possible, we limit faith to something easily understood and mortal."

"Do you remember the preface of your Vie de Jésus? Renan says that religion is false when it tries to define, and true when it affirms. You have quite brushed up my curiosity about such books, by the way. I shall read some of them while I am loafing down here."

"Did you come to loaf?" asked Leonida gaily.

"Loafing is the consequence, but not the cause. I was moved to come by a frantic desire to get away from house-parties. When you are my age you will understand how much agony a week-end may contain. One's hostess is invariably worried for fear one is bored, and one is invariably worried for fear one's hostess will catch on to the fact that one only came to be polite. But I have a cipher with a friend of mine at his club in town, and whenever I wire asking how stocks are, he under-

stands that I can bear matters no longer, and telegraphs me in return that my entire income is in imminent peril, and that I must return to town at once. This scheme originated in my younger days, when I was going too far in innocent flirtations and wanted to pretend to anxious mothers that I was threatened with poverty and was not an eligible match. It has saved me many times."

"I should like to go about and see the world," said Leonida thoughtfully.

"It is a great schoolroom, my dear young lady. We all start out thinking we will reform it, and we end in trying to keep it from perverting us. Personally, I have found it very amusing. If one does not buffet fate, or howl too loudly when one's sugar-plums are taken away, one can get on very well. Don't expect too much of life. Rather expect nothing, and be surprised and grateful for what you get."

When they reached home Leonida held out her hand at the garden gate.

"I don't think I agree with you, but I like you," she said, smiling at him a little shyly.

John Ashburton laughed. "For heaven's sake, let us take care always to disagree, then! Contradiction is the basis of friendship."

III

LEONIDA GROWS UP

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CATHERINE MONTEDONICO often wondered, in those clear, bright, early winter days, why life did not seem more cruel to her. Storm-tossed and turbulent as the years had been, she seemed to have found her moorings now in a quiet harbor, which she felt, instinctively, to be the Great Haven, though she could not yet see the shore that bound it. Her physical suffering was comparatively simple to bear; the rest was harder. The passion of her whole life had turned hungrily to Leonida. It was deep enough to enable her to face even the parting with the girl and the planning ceaselessly for the inevitable loneliness of her future. But, in one way, the mother was a coward. She could not see Leonida suffer; and she blindly groped along, day by day,

encouraging Leonida's belief in her improvement, and closing her tired eyes to the fact that she was doing the girl—and her womanhood—an injustice.

She had been one of those delicate souls who start out in life with high standards, only to see them continually degraded. Her mother and her home had bruised her ideals, until they were warped enough to center themselves in Leone Montedonico. If, after the crash of her whole life, Catherine Marweir had gone on loving him and excusing him, the tragedy would have been less. But she saw his true nature finally, and that involved her seeing her own mistake. In the last letter she had ever written her husband she had told him so.

"Do not imagine that I shall spend my life regretting," she wrote. "I know too well how full of work and healing the world is to fold my hands and bemoan my own mistakes. I shall always be sorry, but I shall never flagellate myself into remorse. Remember that!"

She took her stand, and lived up to it with

the spirit of her race and the nobility of her nature. But what she could neither deny nor smother had been the intense weariness of life that had overcome her—a weariness which had made her face, some months before, the decree of her fatal illness with comparative calm. Even her passionate adoration of Leonida burned low before the clear light of the great peace before her. We can live out lives very easily, but we can never cure the wear and tear of years upon our vitality. The nicest mechanism of the human soul can be replaced only by the Master Hand.

Her mental activity had come to her as a great balm. Until Leonida was old enough to be a companion to her she had lived in her books. Too much so, perhaps. She frequently felt now that she had lost the knack of putting herself in touch with people; and that, especially for the girl's sake, was wrong.

She made the effort, finally, of driving over to Carley House, with Leonida, to return Lady Carnifex's visit; and she asked the two Ash-

burtons frequently to the cottage, and strove to catch as much of the fleeting winter sunshine as possible and store it in Leonida's dark eyes.

John Ashburton telegraphed from Carley Weir, in November, and declined most of his house-parties. He informed every one that his brother, who was to stop in Devon until after Christmas that year, was really too crabbed to be left alone. He often rode over to tea with Lady Carnifex, hunted three days of the week with Geoffry, and spent his evenings with Madame Montedonico and Leonida. It was quite clear that he was turning something over in his mind.

"Are you considering writing a book, my dear Jack?" the doctor asked him one evening, glancing over his newspaper at his brother. "You are so grave."

He laughed as he lit his pipe. "No; I am only considering whether I can put the finishing touch to a book I have more than half written, which will make it worth reading."

One bright, cold Sunday, just before Christmas, John walked home from church with Madame Montedonico. He noted carefully that her steps were short and uncertain, and that there was a curious gray tinge in her cheeks as she paused, half-way up the hillside, and looked thoughtfully out to sea, resting her arms on the low stone wall which bound the road.

"I must rest a moment," she said. "I find I am not so strong as I was."

Suddenly, in that moment, John Ashburton felt himself almost awe-stricken by the sheer, invincible nerve with which this woman faced the future. Did she know what sort of a death was before her, what terrible things every day brought nearer to her?

She spoke again, after a moment's silence, and there was a smile in her eyes as she turned them to him.

"I often think," she resumed, "how curiously replete with life the world seems when we suddenly find our days numbered. Every

morning now the sea looks to me almost painfully blue, and the sun almost dazzlingly golden. Beauty is never more infinite than when we are just about to open our childish eyes on a far maturer beauty. It seems a strange paradox."

It was the first time that she had actually mentioned her condition to him, and, unlike most men, his certain feminine quality saved him from a painful shrinking from the subject.

"When one is going with such a faith and conviction as yours," he returned, thoughtfully fingering her prayer-book as it lay on the wall between them, "we who stay behind for a few hours longer can but envy you."

Catherine Montedonico's eyes darkened a little. "I have come to the dark part of the road—the part we must all do alone," she said. "Seeing my own soul face to face, I have said to myself that, if my faith were, in truth, small and of little scope, at least I believe what I do believe with all my heart. I have lived it into my life. I am testing it in

a long and hard death." She turned impulsively and looked up the road, where Leonida and Rufus and Geoffry Carnifex were disappearing into the cottage garden. "I am leaving a good deal behind me."

Ashburton smiled as he saw the direction of her look. "She will be a very beautiful woman," he replied.

Madame Montedonico was silent for a moment, gazing intently at the girl's distant figure. Then she faced him again.

"Mr. Ashburton," she said, "I want you to be very careful with Leonida."

John Ashburton's eyes opened suddenly. "Careful, my dear lady?"

"Yes, careful. Very, very careful. I have brought her up to believe in even such fallible things as men."

Their eyes met for a moment, like the crossing of sword points. Then John laughed.

"Dear madame, I know women very well," he remarked easily.

She looked him over thoughtfully. "You

know women, but not woman," she said slowly. "There are things in some of us which you do not admit, because you have never seen them—things of which Leonida is capable, and which are past your comprehension. She will be moved all her life by generous, high-minded, and perhaps very unwise, impulses. I do not"—she paused for a moment—"I do not want cheap cynicism to be one of those impulses."

"Perhaps I am cynical because I have seen too much of life."

"I should rather say, my friend, that you are cynical because you have never lived enough." She smiled. "Do you forget that I used to know Alice Treherne?"

But John Ashburton, when all was said and done, was a very clever man, and he carried himself well now.

"Alice, Alice, with the brown hair?" he returned lightly. "Surely I don't forget it. And how desperately in love with her I was! I wish you could have seen the glimpse I had

of her in Paris, some five or six years ago. She had dyed her hair a brilliant yellow and had not been able to afford to buy a fringe to match. Thus do our Spanish castles crumble!"

"Why did you never marry her?" asked Catherine Montedonico suddenly.

"I had the honor of being refused at her hands, dear madame."

She leaned forward and began to draw patterns on the wall with her black gloved hand.

"Alice Treherne was too good for you, Mr. Ashburton," she said. "In spite of her hair and her middle-aged weight, she holds a whole family together and struggles nobly to keep a diminutive pot boiling. She was too good for you, and you are going to hate me ever afterward for telling you so."

Ashburton flushed. His vanity was perhaps the only thing he did not have under perfect control.

"Since I have inspired your hate so far," Catherine continued, still intent on her pat-

terns on the wall, "answer me a question: How many people have ever told you a big truth like that in your life?"

He rose to the occasion with a readiness that surprised her.

"Only you—and Alice herself, when she said to me that I did not understand her well enough to really care for her, and that one forgot most things in time."

There was silence for a few moments. They both looked out to the great sheet of sea below them, sparkling in the midday winter sunshine.

"How small—how miserably small—all our little joys and woes must seem to you now," John said at last.

She smiled her smile that was always a little too grave, as Leonida had said. "Yet the little joys and woes make up the process of living," she answered. "What would you have? Except for Leonida, my own life has been dead these many years. The world has affected me only as it seemed likely, in her

totally unprotected future, to affect her. My one reason for wishing to live longer would have been to see her married and settled. And yet there are so few men who could handle a high, delicate soul like hers!"

"What is your ideal for her, may one ask?"

Madame Montedonico thought for a moment.

"Leonida must marry a young man, above everything—a man who looks at life from the same untinged standpoint as herself. He must be of a nature rather simple than subtle, and rather fulfilling her defects than matching her virtues. Most important of all, he must be normal. She will always lean a little to the dramatic and the high-flown, and the best steadying in the world for her would be that of a very healthy nature."

"My mother," remarked Ashburton, smiling, "once planned for me such a match, which was to be much on your plan—each fulfilling defect in each. Behold the result!"

She laughed. "Were the women too wise,

or perhaps too foolish—for you are a very charming man, Mr. Ashburton?"

They turned away from the sea and began to mount the hill again. John Ashburton lifted his hat, and showed his iron-gray hair in the sunlight.

"You are very complimentary," he said; "but I have been refused only once, and that—" He broke off suddenly, with a little shrug.

"The best criticism on *that* is that you have never asked another woman since."

They walked on in silence to the cottage gate. There Madame Montedonico paused.

"It is a pity," she said slowly, "that she dyes her hair."

"Yes," answered John, a sharp smile snapping out in his keen eyes, "it is, to say the least, a pity. I would never have let her do it. But I hear her husband is quite impossible. He gets his clothes ready-made, they tell me."

"Mother," said Leonida, one evening as the two sat together in front of the fire, her small, firm chin resting on her hands, and her eyes deep in the blaze, "mother, do you know it seems to me I'm awfully wicked!"

"Why, dear?" replied Madame Montedonico, rather wearily. She closed her book and dropped her hands, thinner than ever and more tremulous for the past week, in her lap.

"Because I can't believe things," said Leonida briskly, going to the point with her usual energy. "I often wonder what's to become of me. I can fall back on you for my faith now, but suppose I should go away to visit some one, and they should have prayers, and all that sort of thing. If I couldn't pray with my whole heart, I oughtn't to pray at all, ought I? Wouldn't it be rather mean and underhand?"

Catherine Montedonico sat upright sud-

denly. Her thoughts flew to John Ashburton. Had he been talking religion to the child?

"What do you mean, Leonida?" she asked sharply. "What has been the use of all our talks and of—of my entire life, if you can not realise what God is and how easily one can believe in and trust him? Look at me; you know I pray with my whole heart every day of my life. Child, child, look at me, and think what need of faith and help I have had." She drew Leonida impulsively to her knees and kissed the brown head. "There, there, we mustn't worry you yet with dogma and arguments. Forget it for now. Some day we can talk of it again."

Leonida's brow wrinkled beneath the touch of her mother's caressing fingers.

"But how *can* I forget it, mother? Sometimes it worries me terribly and makes me feel like a sort of a sinner. One of the books that Rufus Carnifex lent me said that faith was the most important thing in life, and even if a man had sinned for years, if he turned

to penitence on his death-bed he would be saved. I can't believe that kind of thing; but I do wish I could feel that God were not such a far-off, distant creature."

The older woman was silent. A great pain came into her eyes, and the touch of her hand on Leonida's hair grew gentler and gentler.

"Leonida," she said at last, "I want you to remember what I am going to say to you as long as you live. Your ideas now are, like every one else's in the beginning, unformed. Each book you read, each person you talk with, affects you more or less. But you will very soon come to a point where the veil will be opened to you, and you will see the relative value of things. There are two paths that lead to God, Leonida; one is joy, the other is sorrow. The first moment in my life when I understood him was once when I threw myself on my knees and cried for joy. The first time you understand him will probably be when you turn to him in sorrow. Yet I do not want you to think that it is only in a

moment of supreme emotion and tenderness that one first sees the height of life. Remember that it has been worked for and planned for for years, and when the culmination is reached we open our souls to the light; just as when you used to run to me, as a little child, and tell me all your joys and sorrows, but one day something larger and greater came, and you realised, all at once, by my response and by my tenderness, how very greatly I loved you."

Madame Montedonico thought for a moment before she went on:

"Think always of God as an embodiment of two great things—Infinite Wisdom and Love. For some end which we do not know, Leonida, that Wisdom made this world, so fair and so vast, and put into it us little men —little only in body and comprehension, but with the germ of something divine within each one of us, something which is immortal. We are set to live different lives, with our souls and their welfare in our own hands; the only

way we can do this, with much about us that is crooked and less that is straight, is to turn back to the Love and Infinite Wisdom which made us, and lay up their strength in our hearts. To me it is one of the greatest proofs of God's existence that the divine in each of us is only developed by our own efforts and our own realisation of good and evil. There is no arbitrary power to pass sentence on one's life save one's own scales of conscience, poised on all the true and noble that has lit our past and makes our future hope. I can not explain to you, any more than any one could ever explain to me, the why and wherefore of life. If we understood God's plans we should be as he; and there would be nothing to work for. It is hard enough as it is. Yet at the end, I believe, he will see that each one of us might have done worse."

She paused again, and held her hand over her eyes.

"Another thing I want you to feel, dear, is that the something divine in you must never

be lowered. By beautifying your soul you will be beautifying the world. We, each one of us, make by our lives and our efforts the abstract standards called nobility and self-abnegation and morality. So that personal sacrifice becomes small when one is adding to the principle of right. Our lives touch each other more closely than any of us realise, and we are responsible for our smallest actions. Remember that. And the power, and the strength, and the love to do all this lies in your own heart. God expects you to make use of the divine in you. He expects you to conquer the little things. For instance, when you pray for rain or for fine weather, it always seems to me to be belittling God. His works are too infinite for that. But when you lift up your very heart and say, 'O God, give me strength to bear the little trials of daily life as they may come,' then you are really praying. We can not change God's mind, Leonida. His purposes are too vast for that. But what we can do is to love him—that is,

to love everything beautiful and noble, and only the beautiful and noble, and to ask for a quiet and equable soul, no matter what the chances of life bring us. And at the last he will understand — he will understand better than the most loving father how dark the road was, how dim the light. Never pray to God for justice, child. For he himself *is* justice, and portions our rewards according to our own soul's standards. It seems to me to be trying to put something infinite with something mortal when people try to induce him to have mercy on them—he, who *is* all mercy, who *is* all forgiveness. You may not be able to understand this now; perhaps you will not be able to understand it until you are near death. For death makes all things clear to us."

Her eyes grew suddenly deeper and darker.

"When the evening comes, Leonida, and we fold our work and put it aside, God's love is never greater. He lets our tired eyelids close, and, amidst all earthly doubts and perplexities, he gives us the knowledge that, in some

better world, all will be made clear to us. The greater hearted we have been here, so much more will we appreciate the life there. Those who have conquered here will see things in their true light there; those who have failed here will not understand there. That, my child, is what is meant by heaven and hell. But we shall be able to grow, to learn, and to expand there, too, Leonida, so that the greatest failure may be developed into a success at last."

Leonida, stirred by something in her mother's voice, caught the thin hands and pressed them against her lips.

"And for each one of us there is something special waiting there. If we have bravely fought doubts here, the solving will be there; if we have puzzled here, it will be made clear there; if we have been starved here, we shall be filled there—there, Leonida, in the place of fulfilment."

A silence fell upon the room. The firelight flickered on the two figures and bur-

nished Leonida's hair. The sparks shot fitfully out every now and then. Catherine Montedonico's fingers moved ceaselessly over the girl's cheek. She was battling with herself, as one could tell by the lines of her forehead and the even unusual pallor of her face. But she had learned the lesson of life so well that outwardly she was the same gentle, rather cold woman. In some of us self-control comes as almost a curse; to others it is a primal necessity. Yet it is never called upon for years without blunting the finer points of tenderness, and making our smiles less frequent and our tears less ready.

She straightened herself suddenly in her chair as a clock struck somewhere. Her mind was made up. Her mouth twitched at the corners as she turned to the girl and took her face between her two hands and kissed it.

"Stand up before me, Leonida," she said.

Leonida smiled as she rose to her feet. "Mother, darling, I *have* outgrown this dress, if that's what you mean——"

Her voice dropped away as she caught sight of her mother's eyes. For a moment the silence of the room was almost unbearable. Then Leonida straightened herself, as the older woman had done a moment before. It was a characteristic action with both of them.

"What is the matter?" she asked. She was very pale, and her voice had something strange in it.

Then it was that Catherine Montedonico—the woman who had faced the greatest misery with strength and judgment, the woman who had won her battle for herself while losing it in the eyes of the world—failed. She leaned suddenly against her child and burst into a passionate flood of tears.

"Leonida, Leonida," she moaned, "I am going to die!"

In that moment Leonida grew up and became a woman. A little tremor went through her, but her hands were cool and steady as she laid them on her mother's head, and her breath came and went evenly. One great thought

only was surging through her brain—her mother was frightened. For the first time in Leonida's life, she had given way and broken. It was the girl's turn to live now.

Madame Montedonico shook violently, and she leaned against Leonida with all her weight. Her words came in thick, short gasps, and her tears almost choked her voice.

"I couldn't tell you before, Leonida, but you must have seen how ill I was. Dr. Ashburton was going to tell you, but I couldn't bear that—he's such a stranger. God help me, God help me!"

Leonida saw that something must be done. She carefully measured the distance to the sofa at the other end of the room. Then she bent down and picked up the quivering form in her strong young arms. Before Catherine Montedonico had realised what had happened she was lying comfortably on her couch, with warm rugs over her, and her hands were being tenderly chafed. Her sobs grew calmer and her tears flowed more quietly.

"There, dearest," said Leonida gently. "You'll feel easier here. Try to close your eyes and be quite still."

And so they remained through the long winter evening—the woman weak and exhausted, the girl kneeling on the floor by the sofa with her mother's head against her breast. The wind rose outside and rattled against the windows. A log broke and fell to pieces in the fireplace. But Catherine Montedonico did not hear. She had fallen into a tired sleep, with the feeling that her fight was over at last, and that she was in the hands of a soul stronger than her own.

Leonida's mind was busy. She went back, week after week, month after month, seeing thousands of little incidents in their true light. A flood of pity and tenderness welled up in her heart, and her tears dropped one by one on the seamed forehead. Only one passionate prayer could rise to her lips—that it might not be long.

In time to come, the girl often went back

across the years to that night. It was the starting-point of her maturity. Suddenly there had been awakened in her that strength and independent courage which were her birthright from her mother. She could not see ahead now, for herself; the one suffering figure filled the future. But she could vaguely understand the cool, steady judgment she would need, the iron self-control, and the enduring patience. Those who are made of strong material lead lonely lives. Leonida, in later years, often thanked God that, on this night, she had not been able to look ahead.

IV

A MISTAKE

IV

A MISTAKE

THE daffodils were early that year. They opened their eyes to the March sunlight, and drank in the first spring breezes that swept over the moor. The world suddenly seemed to grow young. The sea laughed softly as it beat against the cliffs and murmured some secret to the budding earth. In Leonida's garden there were already anemones, and tiny green spears announced the coming of the crocus army.

The first morning that the daffodils were full blown, the girl went into the garden and stood looking at them thoughtfully. She shivered a little, though the day was mild, as she bent to gather some of the freshest and sweetest, and, as she pressed them against her cheek, her eyes were full of tears.

"I hate to have you die, you poor things," she whispered. "But she does so want to see you!"

She walked over to the gate and stood leaning on it, looking out to the sea with the sparkle of the morning sunshine on its waves. There was an almost unbearable beauty in the day. Why—why was life so simple and fair here, and a few paces away, in that still room, so horrible? Leonida dropped the flowers suddenly, and put her hands over her ears to shut out the remembered sound of that labored breathing, that pitiful gasp of pain, that moan of a suffering beyond control.

So John Ashburton found her, as he rode up the road a moment later and dismounted at the cottage gate.

"What is the matter?" he called quickly, a sharp fear in his voice.

She caught sight of him and smiled rather sadly, then bent to pick up the flowers at her feet.

"It is nothing," she said; "I got to think-

ing, and dropped my daffodils. When did you come down from London?"

"Only last night," said John; and, having tied his horse to the gate with a care that was characteristic of him, he came forward to take her hand. "Only last night—and here I am already, you see. How is she?"

The girl's lips tightened. "Worse."

"Does she suffer much?"

"Yes. She suffers both mentally and physically—but she would rather not have us dwell on it. The end can not be far away."

John Ashburton cut at the hedge fiercely with his crop. He was watching Leonida keenly.

"Do you know why I came down to Devon last night?" he said suddenly.

She looked up quickly, with a vague surprise in her eyes. He moved nearer to her.

"I came, Leonida," he continued slowly, "to ask you to be my wife. I am, by all standards of the world, many years too old for you. I am a more or less selfish man, and I have led

a more or less selfish life. On the contrary, I have no bad habits, and a sufficient income to make you comfortable. You—" he stretched out his hand suddenly toward her—"you are very young, and you will be very lonely. It would mean a great—happiness—in my life." He paused and straightened himself again. "There it is. I ask you to do me the honor to be my wife."

Leonida had grown very pale, but her eyes were bright and her head unusually erect.

"And I," she said coolly, "decline that honor, Mr. Ashburton."

John Ashburton did not move, but the whip in his hand suddenly snapped. He was a man of strong self-control; but he had sunk, in the last moments, in his own estimation: he had allowed himself to be surprised.

"Shall I tell you why you ask me to marry you?" Leonida went on, her voice measured and even, "because you pity me. Because your brother has told you that my poor mother's greatest dread is my uncertain future.

But I would not marry you if I were starving, Mr. Ashburton." She paused for a moment. "I will do you the justice to say that you do not pretend to any love for me. Your motive may even have been a generous one. But I have not fallen so low that I will marry a man who asks me out of pity."

She turned and walked up the garden path to the house. At the door she paused, and looked back at him.

"If you had asked me to marry you because you loved me," she said slowly, "I would have given you another answer. I will not marry you now because I do not want your pity. I would not have married you then because I do not want your love."

A moment later and John Ashburton was alone in the spring sunshine, having been refused for the second time in his life.

As the house door closed behind Leonida she stumbled against Rosa, the little maid, who was hurrying down the narrow entry.

"Oh, miss," she gasped, "your mother——"

Leonida clutched the girl, who was white with terror, by the shoulders and stopped her.

"What is it, Rosa? Keep quiet and tell me!"

"She woke in a fearful way, miss. I think she's dying!"

Leonida wrenched open the front door and pushed her out.

"Run!" she said shortly. "Run to the nearest house and tell some man to ride for his life for Dr. Ashburton."

Rosa hung back. "But you, miss—I can't leave you all alone."

"Hurry!" cried Leonida hoarsely. Then she turned and dashed up the stairs.

Catherine Montedonico, feeble as she was, was almost upright in her bed. Her eyes were wide and her face was gray. She held out her shaking arms.

"Leonida!" she panted. "Leonida, I am dying. Come close to me, child—closer—closer, Leonida."

Leonida had fallen on her knees by the bed and gathered the shrunken form into her arms. Her cheek was against her mother's.

"Here I am, dearest," she said steadily. "You are safe with me."

The sick woman gasped for a moment. Then she got her voice:

"Leonida, remember all I have told you. Try to lead a clean, good life. If you are happily married some day, do not blame me for my own mistakes—" Her weakness overcame her, yet she struggled on—"do not blame me for my own mistakes. If your father had not left me I would have lived it out, Leonida —I would have lived it out."

The girl pressed her lips to the drawn forehead. "Mother, mother!" she murmured.

The dying voice was beyond speech now, but the great eyes, dark with death, spoke some entreaty. By instinct Leonida seemed to know what her mother wanted. She drew the trembling body closer to her, and began, in her strong, low voice:

"For thou only art rest. Whithersoever the soul of man turneth it findeth sorrow, except only in thee. Fix there, then, thy resting-place, my soul. Lay up in him what thou hast received from him. Commend to the keeping of the truth whatever the truth hath given thee, and thou shalt lose nothing. And thy dead things shall revive, and thy weak things shall be made whole."

Catherine Montedonico looked into her child's eyes and smiled. Then, very peacefully, she died.

How long Leonida knelt there by the bed she never knew. Some sound broke suddenly through the still house, and she moved at last. She rose slowly to her feet, and looked at the rigid white face on the pillow. She realised in that moment that the most precious thing in her life was dead; that the memory of her childhood was gone forever; and that the one irreparable loss in the world had befallen her.

Her strong, slim hands did not quiver as

she closed her mother's eyes and folded the sheets over the shrunken body. Yet, when she had mechanically straightened the room, she stood helpless, gazing fixedly at the still form on the bed with a feeling of almost unbearable desolation. Then, turning instinctively to the things she loved best, she moved over to the window and let in the air and the sunlight.

It was almost noon, and the sun was blazing down on the village. The sea was such an opalescent blue that it seemed unnatural, and the street of the town looked almost snow-white beside it. Leonida put her hand to her head. Surely, everything was abnormally colored and strange. She suddenly realised that she might give way herself, and that she must call for help.

She closed the room door behind her and began to descend the narrow stairs, a little uncertainly. A sob caught in her throat. Suppose she should fall or lose consciousness? She was so alone and so helpless.

"I will *not* faint," she said aloud, her dry, white lips quivering. "I will *not* faint."

A great wave of darkness surged over her, and she caught at something before her. A moment later the weakness had passed, and she realised that she was at the foot of the stairs, holding fast to Rufus Carnifex's hands.

"Leonida," he was saying, "Leonida, don't try to stand—sit down on the stairs for a moment. Poor child!"

She sank down helplessly, resting her throbbing head against the banisters. Rufus fetched some water, and she vaguely felt him moisten her forehead. It was very good to have some one so tender close by, she thought; and there was a gentleness about Rufus which belongs only to men who have suffered themselves.

When she had rested a few moments, she let him help her out into the fresh air. They stood side by side in the little garden, Leonida with her eyes on the sea, Rufus watching her

hair as the wind ruffled it. She looked up at him suddenly.

"She has just died," she said.

Rufus turned away, instinctively avoiding the pain in her eyes.

"I was riding past," he began slowly, "with my brother, and we met your maid. Geoffry went back for Dr. Ashburton, as his horse was fresher than mine; and I came in and waited until I should hear you stir. I—I didn't exactly like to go up-stairs."

"Yes," said Leonida mechanically, "I know."

"There is nothing to do," went on Rufus, laying his thin hand gently on her shoulder, "but wait until the doctor comes."

"Yes," said Leonida again.

So they stood there, side by side, in the spring sunshine. And if, in truth, the spirits of the dead are present with us, Catherine Montedonico must have been well content with the tenderness of the man on whom her child leaned in the hour of her sorest need.

V

THE LEGEND OF TRINGARTH

V

THE LEGEND OF TRINGARTH

Two weeks later, Leonida lay, one late afternoon, on a sofa in the dim hall of Carley House. She had grown painfully thin in the last days, and her black dress emphasized the great rings under her eyes. Lady Carnifex was tending the girl with her own pretty, insipid, but withal very kindly little hands. She had taken an immense fancy to Leonida, bringing her to Carley House the very day of the funeral, and petting and spoiling her ever since. Sir Rufus, too, in his rough way, was growing fond of her, and frankly abused the idea of her joining her grandmother and hurrying her departure.

"I suppose one of the boys will fall in love with her," Lady Carnifex had said, when they

discussed the matter. "She will make a lovely bride. She has such a nice figure."

"She has a terrible old woman for a grandmother, Carrie," objected Sir Rufus from behind his newspaper.

"My dear Rufus, there is no woman in London more religious than I, I'm sure. I've just paid six pounds for having my Bible rebound in that lovely new shade of mauve leather; but I really don't think we can ask everything of heaven. There's no better blood in England than the Marweirs, and the old countess mightn't turn up at the marriage or live long enough to be at the first baby's christening. Every family is founded on a skeleton, I believe; and Leonida herself makes up for fifty Lady Marweirs. She has more than most girls, in my opinion. I think I should wear pink at the wedding."

Leonida herself was silent and absent. It was with a great effort that she forced herself to take an interest in Sir Rufus's horses and Lady Carnifex's frocks. The whole life was

such an absolute contradiction of her old one that she could not get her soundings, and felt hopelessly adrift and lonely. One point, however, she had settled: that it would be a relief to have work to do. She had written to her grandmother that she would join her whenever she was sent for. The old countess had been on the Continent at the time of Madame Montedonico's death, and had sent very hysterical telegrams and very gaudy flowers. She meant to spend the summer at Montreux, in Switzerland—not because Geneva was beautiful, but because the hotel was cheap; and as soon as a fitting escort turned up she would expect Leonida to come to her. Leonida herself would far rather have lived on with some one in Carley Weir, for which simple life her slender income would have been ample. But, already, she was too strong and idealistic a nature not to feel the need of a duty and a work, for some one or something. Lady Marweir seemed her first call, and, besides that, Catherine Montedonico had wished it.

All the long spring afternoon Leonida had lain in the cool, quiet hall, and had tried her best to obey Lady Carnifex's injunctions and sleep. But she felt a sudden relief as the servants brought in the lamps, and some doors banging in the distance announced the family returning to tea.

Lady Carnifex and Sir Rufus came in first. They had been driving over the moor to see some distant neighbors, and Sir Rufus looked bored and his wife elated. She kissed Leonida, saw that the shawl over her feet was a warm one, and then bustled over to the tea things.

"Well, my dear, we really got off awfully easily, and now it's done at last. They were all at home—fancy, every one of that great Fitzgerald family, and the children were playing horse on the drawing-room floor when we went in. I never allowed Rufus and Geoffry so much as inside the drawing-room, did I, Rufus? Archie Fitzgerald is an awfully nice man, but he does play the worst game of

bridge. I thought they might have asked us to stop and have a game this afternoon, but they didn't. Two pieces of sugar, dear?"

"Gad, but Fitzgerald's got a fine litter of pigs!" said Sir Rufus, munching his muffin with solid enjoyment. "But his stables aren't half as good as mine, Carrie, and there's no use blowing about it. Nice fellow, though. Where are the boys?"

"Here's one of them," said Rufus, coming in with his gentle tread and carefully drawing the curtains over the doorway behind him. "Geoffry went for a long ride. How he could go off again, having been in the saddle all morning and all of yesterday, I can not understand."

"I can," said Leonida suddenly. "I could ride forever, I think."

"I never consider," Rufus went on, taking his tea from his mother, "that it is wise to give oneself exclusively to any one sport. Concentrated occupation is a duty; concentrated sport always seems a waste of time."

"Dear me!" put in Lady Carnifex, "how clever that sounds! Really, Rufus dear, I hope you'll do something with your book. My father used to write awfully sweet letters. Lots of clever people don't write, though. Look at Mr. Ashburton. He doesn't write, and he's terribly clever. Don't you think so, Leonida?"

Leonida turned to move the cushion behind her head. "Yes, Lady Carnifex, I think he is a very clever man."

A silence fell upon the room. Rufus walked over and picked up a book from the floor at Leonida's feet.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "you dropped your book. I hope you enjoyed it this afternoon. I marked the passages I thought would help you most."

Leonida looked up at him, and her brow wrinkled.

"I'm awfully sorry, but I haven't opened it. I don't think I'm intelligent enough to understand it, Mr. Carnifex."

Rufus smiled. "We are all more or less unintelligent in the beginning," he responded. "You don't know how difficult I found it to comprehend these things at first. Now, with study and practise, it all seems as clear as day. I only recommend it to you because I know that, in the end, it will give you a great source of strength and happiness."

"You are very good," said Leonida penitently, "and some day I will try again to get into it. But—don't you think I might read other things—just now?"

"I think you are mistaken in putting it off," said Rufus stiffly.

Lady Carnifex rattled the sugar-tongs crossly. "Oh, Rufus, *don't* say 'you're mistaken,' say 'you're wrong.' It's so much less patronising. I'm sure that sort of book always gives me a headache. Help for Every Day, isn't it? I don't believe in reading such things, myself. I don't know where you got all this religion from, Rufus. And it's made you thin; your shoulders are a third narrower

than Geoffry's. Personally, I think it is most unnecessary to be thinking about the hereafter so much, and all that sort of thing. I'm sure no one can ever tell if you're right or wrong, so where's the satisfaction of it? Ring the bell, please. I hear Geoffry coming."

The front door blew shut with a crash, and the terriers came rushing into the room, tumbling joyously over each other, and finally landing by Leonida on the sofa. The girl's eyes were brighter and her head was turned to the other end of the hall, where Geoffry was throwing aside his crop and whistling to the dogs. He came in like a breath of fresh air —like something strong and free and pure, Leonida thought.

"Hello, everybody!" he said, slipping his arm about his mother. "Whew, I've had a long ride! Did you go to the Fitzgeralds, too, Rufus? Yes, tea, please."

Rufus, sitting bent forward in his chair, with his eyes on Leonida, carefully flecked a bit of dust from his coat.

"No; I've been here all afternoon. I've been busy."

"The book?"

"Yes, the book."

"Where did you go, Geoff?" asked Sir Rufus, looking with solid approval at his great son towering beside him. "Good ride?"

"Splendid, father; I wish you'd been along. I rode over to Porlock, and on my way back I stopped at Carley Weir for a moment. By the way, Leonida, I stopped to get these for you."

He pulled a bunch of faded pansies from his pocket, and gave them to her with his frank smile.

"I'm afraid they're rather rumpled, but I had no place else to put them. You said you'd like the first ones from your garden."

Leonida looked steadfastly at the flowers on her lap. Her eyes were full of tears as she raised them to her face.

"It was awfully good of you, Geoffry," she said gently; "thank you."

"I say, mother," Geoffry went on, going back to the tea-table and balancing himself on the arm of Lady Carnifex's chair, "let's bring all the puppies in to-night and have a romp. I stopped at the kennels just now, and the dogs are all splendid. Dear little mother, doesn't she look fine? I love that hat—you look sweet sixteen over again."

Lady Carnifex patted her head and colored with pleasure.

"My dear boy, I'm really getting very old. I'm going to change this sort of veil I wear. Maud Fitzgerald has a lovely kind, from Jay's; but then her complexion is awful."

"You really should not allow the dogs in here to-night," said Rufus, disapprovingly. "They twist the rugs every which way and jump on the best chairs."

"Well," replied his mother resignedly, "I'm going up-stairs. You can settle the dogs among yourselves. I don't care, I'm sure. Dear me, I wish my hair would stay in curl!

Leonida, what are you going to do before dinner?"

Leonida rose from the sofa, and wrapped her shawl about her. "I'm going for a walk to the kennels, if I may. I want to see the puppies."

"Yes," said Geoffry, looking about for his cap, "she ought to see them. Father, I ordered that new strap fitted to your saddle in Porlock. Come on, Leonida."

The door closed behind the two. Lady Carnifex stood silent at the foot of the staircase for a moment, absently running a hat-pin into the hat she held.

"I hope they won't have a long engagement," she said at last.

"Oh, bosh! Carrie," grunted Sir Rufus crossly.

"You are worrying quite unnecessarily," said Rufus, in his stiff way. "Geoffry feels for Leonida only the purest friendship. I know, because he told me so."

"My dear Rufus," replied Lady Carnifex wearily, "in most matters you really are an awful fool."

The kennels of Carley House were one of Sir Rufus's tenderest points and the envy of half the countryside. There are few sights more full of inconsequent fun than that of forty or fifty puppies tumbling over each other with health and spirits and quarreling lustily over their evening meal. They had appealed to Leonida at once, and she had formed the habit of watching them at their supper, just at dusk, every evening during her stay at Carley House.

To-night she and Geoffry stood gazing at the dogs over the wall which bounded their yard. There was a din of barks and yelps, and the cries of the stable-boys.

"They're really splendid," said Geoffry, enthusiastically. "I've never seen young dogs in better trim. Have you ever noticed that each one of them looks human? Look at that sol-

emn black and white chap, now—who *is* he like? Why, Rufus, of course!"

Leonida laughed, but her laugh was a little grave.

"I wish Rufus didn't stick in the house so," she observed. "He'll be ill if he isn't careful. I should be worried about him if he were my brother."

"But he isn't," returned Geoffry cheerfully.

"No, of course not. Still, I think he'll regret keeping indoors so much some day. He hasn't got your spirits, you see."

Geoffry whistled a little tune under his breath. "Leonida, I'll tell you a secret. I'm in especially good spirits to-night. This afternoon I stopped at Carley Weir to get the post, and found the letter I've been waiting for so long from my cousin in America—didn't I tell you about him? He's a jolly good chap—owns a ranch out in Texas, and wants me to come and go shares with him. They buy and sell horses, you know, and father says I've a fair eye for that sort of thing. It's an unusual

chance, and I don't have to wait, either. I can start next week."

Leonida was strangely silent. She suddenly drew her shawl closer about her, and shivered.

"You see," Geoffry went on, "it's just what I want, because everything, more or less, of father's goes to Rufus with the title; and a younger son's no good in England, anyway. With the capital I've got to start on I ought to make a fairly nice thing of it. I don't want to be a burden on father, and one of these days I sha'n't want to be a burden on Rufus. I mean to tell father to-night, and I think he'll be as glad as I. He doesn't like stay-at-home sons. Of course it'll be beastly leaving mother and every one, but they say that Western life is simply ripping, and I've always wanted to try it. I'll miss you, Leonida, awfully. We've grown to be such good friends. I hope you'll miss me a bit, too."

He laid his big hand on her slim, strong fingers, as they rested on the gray stone of

the wall, and smiled down into her eyes. She was an unusually tall woman, yet she scarcely reached Geoffry's shoulder. So they stood, silent, for a moment, then Leonida lifted her hand and gave his a friendly little pat.

"I'm awfully glad, Geoffry," she said simply. "I hope you'll do a lot of good work and make a fortune. Can't we go in and see the puppies now?"

And they went into the kennel yards, and played with the dogs until dinner time.

That night, after dinner, the prospects of Geoffry's new opening were fully discussed. Sir Rufus was plainly delighted, and said so. A manly, wholesome, open-air life appealed to him above everything, and, like most of his kind, the love he bore his favorite son consisted more in the pride of Geoffry's riding and in his manliness than in his mere companionship. Rufus looked at his mother with an "I told you so" air of patronage, which

ruffled all that lady's feathers at once, and then remarked that he had heard, on fairly reliable authority, that the climate of Texas was salubrious.

"I don't care a bit for the salubriety, or whatever one calls it," retorted Lady Carnifex crossly. "I sometimes think you go out of your way to say disagreeably pedantic things, Rufus. Geoffry's constitution can stand anything. I only hope it won't be disgustingly dirty. Do you suppose they sleep in tents, or wigwams, or what? Oh, dear! And the women are terribly pretty, and Geoffry's sure to make a *mésalliance*. Do you think any of those people have grandfathers? Not much! Why, far less fathers. That land is settled by castaways—awful creatures, who don't know how to spell! Do be careful, Geoffry."

Geoffry burst out laughing. "Why, mother, dear, I won't have time to as much as look at a woman—provided there's one within fifty miles, which isn't likely. You forget I'm

going to work—work—work! Oh, it'll be glorious!"

"I should like to have a try at it myself," Sir Rufus said, slapping Geoffry's back. "Don't worry about dirt and women, Carrie. It'll give the boy a first-rate chance and make a man of him." He turned to Leonida, as she stood beside him before the fire, and laid his hand kindly on her shoulder. "What do you think of it, little lady, eh?"

"Think? I think it's splendid, Sir Rufus; and I think Geoffry's just the sort to make a place for himself, too. I'm delighted."

Lady Carnifex sighed. "Oh, dear!" she said somberly. A moment later her face brightened. "Rufus, there's some one at the hall door. Why, it's John Ashburton! When did *he* come down?"

John came forward and greeted them all with his usual ease and charm. His eyes were quite gentle as he touched Leonida's hand, and there was friendly kindness in his tone as he spoke to her.

"My dear Lady Carnifex, I ran down quite unexpectedly for the week-end, and of course I had to ride across at once to see you. How bright your fire looks—the evenings are surprisingly cold for May. I wasn't interrupting a family confab, was I? You all look so absorbed."

"Oh, dear, no," said Lady Carnifex, settling herself with contentment for a delightful evening, and wishing she had on a more becoming frock. "It's only something that's happened to Geoff. You remember Bobby Hayward, don't you, my cousin? He always would ride horses that were too small for him and pay calls in the evening."

"Bobby Hayward evidently did not understand the fitness of things," John laughed.

"I should think not. He married a very nice girl, whose name I can't remember, but she had red hair. Don't you recollect, Rufus?—we used to sit behind them in church. Well, their son is now living in Texas, and wants Geoffry to come out and go shares in

something or other. They breed horses, you know. For my part, I say it's probably awfully dirty. Don't you think so?"

Ashburton turned to Geoffry. "Not the young Hayward who owns that big ranch and of whom every one thinks so much!" he exclaimed. "Why, it's a splendid chance. Your son's in luck, Sir Rufus."

"He deserves it, he deserves it," grunted Sir Rufus contentedly.

"Decidedly in luck. And is the younger Rufus going too?"

The younger Rufus, at some distance from the party about the fire, shut his book and kept his finger carefully in the correct page. "I beg your pardon?" he said.

John Ashburton's eyes twinkled. Rufus always amused him intensely.

"Are you, too, going with your brother?" he repeated.

"No, most certainly no! I have some very important work on hand here, Mr. Ashburton."

"Of course, your book. I have not heard how it is progressing."

Rufus rose and came and stood beside Ashburton, with his back to the fire.

"I fancy few people know of it at all," he continued. "Even when they do hear of it, I suppose, it is not on a subject which will take with the multitude. It is the result of some years of thought and argument. In fact, it is a sifting. The subject is, you know, the Decline of Modern Christianity. The farther I go the more inadequate I find myself for the task. But I have determined to complete it—and to complete it well. Of course the field is an almost indefinitely wide one."

John lit a cigar. "I don't know," he said. "I shouldn't call any Christianity wide, and I should think the Decline of Modern Christianity narrow compared to its progress."

"This from a cynic!" laughed Geoffry. "Hear, hear!"

"It is impossible for me to argue flippantly about it," replied Rufus. "The subject seems

to me to be so far removed, in its essence, from the frivolous. But when my book is published, Mr. Ashburton, I hope you will read it. It may throw new light on many matters for you."

"Speaking of books," said John, drawing a small volume from his pocket, "I brought you this from town, Leonida; I know you love Mallory and his old legends. These are tales from an old Welsh source, very much of his style and period, and there was one which struck me as so lovely and poetical that I felt I wanted your judgment on it. This is the place."

Leonida took the book, thanking him quietly. There was a curious illustration for frontispiece. It was of a man and a woman, with closed eyelids, bending over a still pool, whose depths they were trying to pierce with their sightless eyes.

"I do not understand," she said slowly. "What does it mean?"

"The quickest way is to hear the story,"

said Geoffry, tossing some wood on the fire. "Read it, Leonida. You read aloud rippingly."

"Yes, do," assented Lady Carnifex, as she tucked another cushion behind her back. "It's perfectly proper, isn't it, Mr. Ashburton? Generally speaking, I think reading aloud is fearfully middle-class—the happy homes of England, and all that sort of thing. But the servants aren't about, and it really doesn't matter."

Before Leonida began, she looked at the three men outlined against the firelight, standing side by side. Geoffry first, his head thrown back, his pipe between his lips, his shoulders squared. His eyes were rather distant—probably in Texas. He was not paying much attention, she thought. Next, Rufus, slightly bent forward, his gaze on the ground, his whole form pigmy beside that of his huge brother. And, last, John Ashburton, smiling, keen, bland, smoking his excellent cigar with evident enjoyment, and watching the girl

closely as she read. The three great influences of her life were before her. Which would come out on top?

Her fingers tightened suddenly about the book, as if in pain. Then she began:

"The Legend of Tringarth and the Mystery of its Haunted Garden.

"Once there wandered over the hills and valleys of this fair country a woman. She moved ceaselessly, taking no rest in the winter's cold or the summer's heat, always with slow and painful footsteps, her groping hands stretched out before her; for she was blind.

"Now it came to pass that after many long and weary winters, a midsummer day dawned for her. She was wending her way through a great and silent forest, where the green branches let the sun flicker down about her head and the quiet of noontide stole into her heart; and there suddenly crossed her path, from among the trees, a man blind as she, the only wound of whose strength was his

sightless eyes. And when she felt him draw near, she shrank back and was afraid.

"But he gently took her hands, and looked with his blindness into her blindness. Yet still she was afraid, and drew back in terror.

"And he passed his arm about her, and she leaned on him in utter weariness, and he led her over the hills.

"At last they came to a great garden at the edge of the forest, full of red June roses; and there were pansies that grew beside the roses, for remembrance. And in the center of the garden there was a still pool. And he led her to its edge and plucked a red rose that grew there and gave it to her; and he drew her closer to him, and they looked, with steadfast hearts, into the pool.

"And suddenly they opened their eyes and saw; and what they saw was each other's face, reflected in the quiet water, against the blue June sky.

"And she knelt on the ground, in the great stillness, with the noonday sun on her hair,

and plucked a pansy and gave it to him, as he had given her the rose, for remembrance.

"For one moment longer he stood and looked at her opened eyes, in the pool. Then, for the world is full of many and great deeds to be done, he turned and went his way.

"And she did not fall to the ground, nor cry out, nor complain. She stood there alone, looking intently into the pool where his image had shone, and holding the red rose to her breast.

"And many years have passed over her head, and many storms, but he has not come to her again.

"She works diligently with her hands in the great garden, toiling in the roughest earth, and pricking herself sorely with thorns, until the blood runs. Her patch of soil is small, but there are many seeds planted in it, and the flowers are budding. Yet a red rose will never blow there again.

"And sometimes, in the quiet night-time, when the day's work is over, she may still be

seen, standing by the edge of the pool, looking into its unfathomable depths, and clasping to her breast a rose that is dead."

The silence in the room was broken by Lady Carnifex.

"How perfectly sweet!" she exclaimed. "Where did you find it, Mr. Ashburton?"

Ashburton shook his shoulders before he replied:

"It is an old Welsh legend, Lady Carnifex. I'm particularly fond of that sort of thing. Now, I want to know what you all make of it?"

"Make of it?" retorted Lady Carnifex briskly. "Why, they were in love, of course, and he had to go away because he had a sick mother, or hereditary disease in his family, or no money, or something of that sort. And she lived on where he'd proposed to her, and always wore black and went to church on the anniversary. That's what I think."

"There was probably a moral obstacle," broke in Rufus pensively. "Perhaps his religion bound him very strongly. Conscience

was a strong factor in the actions of the more primitive men. Gardening would be a poor sort of climax for a woman with true Christian spirit, though."

John coughed suddenly, and hastily turned to Sir Rufus to regain his self-control. That gentleman was fast asleep.

"How about you, Geoffry?"

Geoffry was puffing at his pipe thoughtfully.

"I think it was rather nice in them to do the thing decently, and to make no fuss about it, if they had to give each other up," he said simply. "I'm sure that fellow was a gentleman."

"I think so, decidedly," agreed John. "I have another theory about them, too. I don't believe, somehow, that they *had* to give each other up so much as that they felt it was finer and better, and a matter of honor. It is very beautiful. The line I like best is, 'they saw each other's face reflected in the quiet water against the blue June sky.'"

Leonida stirred suddenly. "The part I like best is, 'yet a red rose will never bloom in her garden again,' " she said.

"Yes, I do think faithfulness is awfully sweet," Lady Carnifex answered. "I knew a woman once who was so faithful to a man. He was in a half-pay regiment in India, too, and a fearful bore. In some cases it's easier than others. He gave her the most hideous engagement ring I've ever seen. It was terribly rough on her."

John Ashburton crossed over to where Leonida sat and spoke gently to her.

"I'm glad you enjoyed it," he said.

"I enjoyed it immensely, and I shall always keep the book," she returned. "I hope always to keep my friends, too, Mr. Ashburton. I'm going, in a week or ten days, to my grandmother, Lady Marweir, in Switzerland; but I hope no one in England will forget me. You wrote me a very kind letter about—about mother's death. Thank you!"

"We shall none of us forget you. So it is

quite settled that you go to your grandmother?"

"Quite settled."

"Well," said John slowly, "I am sorry—for two reasons: first and more egotistically, that we are not to keep you in England; second, and more generally, that you have to discover a new relative. I should rather go on an Arctic expedition."

Leonida gave a little sigh. "I think myself that it may be rather chilly work. But, after all, it is my duty."

"My dear young lady, *don't* go on that premise. If you magnify disagreeable tasks into duties, you will speedily lose your sense of proportion. Natures like yours are very apt to inflate their duties to their neighbors and to let their duties to themselves collapse."

"But what would life be without burdens? I like responsibility, Mr. Ashburton; I could not live without it."

"Nevertheless, with too much of it you will find things very uninteresting. You are the

kind of person who will shoulder, with an exalted fervor, any burden fate gives you to carry, without in the least realising that the burden can always be shaped to fit your own back. There is no telling to what impossible excess this mania may lead you. The most trivial necessities will loom up for you as tabulated commandments; and you will probably end by joining a sisterhood because they need some one to dust an altar, or marrying a man because he needs some one to put his winter clothes in camphor." He dropped his voice. "I am really quite serious. Don't let notions of paths to be followed and duties and exigencies do you yourself an irreparable wrong. Make it your rule of life not so much to do others justice as to do yourself no injustice."

She turned away, looking thoughtfully at the little book she still held, and did not answer.

John bent his head and spoke lower still. "I hope our last meeting and parting will

never make any difference in our friendship, Leonida."

"I hope not. Perhaps I did not do you justice, quite." She hesitated a moment. "Perhaps I myself have a false sort of pride. My view of life is quite different from yours."

He smiled. "And perhaps the right man will give you a red rose to keep for him some day."

"A red rose? How did she keep it, you mean," broke in Lady Carnifex. "Why, she wore it in a locket, of course, with his initials on one side and hers on the other. You can get them at Hunt & Roskell's. They look rather like old Welsh things, anyway."

A few moments later Leonida bade them all good night. She was tired, she said.

Geoffry went with her to the foot of the stairway, and it so happened that John caught what they said to each other.

"You seem done up to-night, Leonida," Geoffry observed. "I think it's that black

dress that makes you look so pale. Do you know, I'll be awfully glad when you take off your mourning, and wear that nice little blue ribbon around your throat again."

Leonida laughed. "I think that is the only personal remark you have ever made to me, Geoffry!" she said.

BOOK TWO

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

I

ANOTHER CONTRAST

BOOK TWO

I

ANOTHER CONTRAST

ADELIZIA, COUNTESS OF MARWEIR, was a woman of whom some one had once said that she had clean lace at her front windows and dirty muslin at her back.

Her whole life had been a continual struggle against a decreasing income. Brought up in a class which spent as it pleased, as accustomed to her diamonds as she was to her title, she seemed fated to see her fortunes drop steadily down hill until they finally collapsed in a rubbish heap at the bottom. Her husband had passed his life vibrating between dissipations and Monte Carlo; her sons followed in his train. Of her two daughters, one died in a sanatorium, the other, sadder still, lived out her life as Catherine Montedonico. But all

this would have affected any other woman far more. The vulgar aristocrats are always worse than the vulgar democrats, and Lady Marweir was vulgar. She was a mistake in her class—though she was the daughter of a baron and the widow of an earl who had despised being made a duke. She talked loud, she dressed loud, she was without the faintest shadow of delicacy. Yet, with it all, her race showed in her in a certain unbreakable spirit, in a wild lavishness, in a pride that, if her sons had gone to the bad, their sins at least had been the sins of their class.

Lady Marweir was clever, and had just missed being intellectual. And her cleverness had stood her in good stead. For long she had fought the world well, getting loans here, there, and everywhere, on incredible securities, trimming her hats with a knack that looked like Paris, browbeating her servants, and trading on the sympathy of every one for her extravagant sons and her drooping position in society. But of late years her age had

reached the point where it touched her spirit, and she had fallen back wearily on the cheapest table d'hôtes, obstreperously juvenile clothes, palpable rouge, tears, and, occasionally, a brandy bottle.

She welcomed Leonida's advent for two reasons—curiously consistent with her contradictory character. She was, first of all, warm-heartedly grieved at the girl's desolation (on hearing of her daughter's death she had pawned her engagement ring in order to send fitting flowers to the funeral)—and she wanted to pet Leonida a little, and be petted in return; and, in the second place, two incomes, however slender, go farther than one, and Lady Marweir's hotel bill promised to decrease proportionately.

Leonida first saw her grandmother one late afternoon in early June. She had reached Montreux after an endless journey, and had been met by the countess's maid; and she felt fagged and discouraged as she entered the diminutive room on the top floor of the hotel

—situated on the side where there were no balconies or views.

Lady Marweir rose from her sofa, drew her shabby tea-gown majestically about her, glanced into the mirror, and fell on the girl's neck. She cried genuinely for a moment, touched by the situation, and remembering Catherine's fresh young girlhood. Then she drew back and looked Leonida over.

"My dear child!" she exclaimed. "How good-looking you are!"

In the days that followed, Lady Marweir was clever enough to understand Leonida at once. If the girl had been ugly and spiritless, and had depended on the old lady's powerful sway, her grandmother would have yawned and let her alone. But she was lovely, she was strong, and she was cleverer than Lady Marweir; also, she knew how to put on her clothes. She listened patiently to her grandmother's gossip, she was unfailingly thoughtful, and she looked a Marweir. The old

countess did a very strange thing: she let Leonida get possession of her heart.

She began to be proud of her, telling her friends in the hotel how many languages she spoke, how good a manager she was, and how like Leonida's her own figure had been. She did not notice that the girl sometimes colored painfully over her broad speeches, or strove to tone down her most vulgar frocks; and if she had noticed, she would not have understood.

The process of getting to know her grandmother interested Leonida intensely, and lent to those first days of loneliness a new character. It was precisely this vitality, this absorbing eagerness, this energy of youth, which was her greatest safeguard. She was too intelligent for her years, and her quick wits spent themselves upon her surroundings.

Their common funds were put into one joint stock, so far as the actual expenses of living went; but Leonida kept the control of the rest of her own money, and quietly as-

sumed that of the full exchequer, too, soon after her arrival. In Lady Marweir's more vivid days she would have resented this step; but now it seemed only a relief to have a steady hand to turn to, and a reliable head to add up correctly and forbid her bank balance overdrawn. She began to ask Leonida for the sums she needed, quite meekly, seeing that tears and anger would be of no avail. In a thousand little ways the girl firmly took her stand; and her grandmother, battered by a long life as she was and with but few flashes of her former energy, leaned with the whole weight of her tired, beaten soul on those strong young shoulders.

At no time does nature seem more tender and personal than in the reaction from a great sorrow. Leonida turned to the beauty of those June days with a full heart. From her window she looked out, beyond the hotel gardens, to a sheet of turquoise water, shimmering in the summer sunshine. There is no lake in the world blue with the blue of Geneva.

At one side the green hills which fringe the shores are broken by Chillon; farther on, below the incomparable valley of the Dents du Midi, the Rhône sweeps its brown waters into the limpid azure. And all about and beyond are rugged, green-brown mountains, capped with hoary streaks of snow which catch the sunlight glory and the moonlight pallor. Terrace after terrace, the vineyards rise from the water's edge; and among the wilder spots and at the outlet of the stern gray gorges, little villages blend with the hillsides behind them, isolated in the peace of their mountain lives.

Eagerly the girl drank it all in. Every morning she would take her book and sit in the gardens, which ran down to the lake, and were quiet and free from all other companionship than that of barelegged, rosy-cheeked French children, chattering to their nurses and dabbling their pink toes in the water. She would open her book mechanically, yet she could not read. Her eyes would be caught

by the sparkle of the sun on some mountain-side, and she would dream day-dreams for hours, the silence only broken for her by the soft wind or that mysterious murmur of the rise and fall of Geneva which seems the heart-beat of the blue water against the land. Back to her mother her thoughts would travel—and slowly there grew in her an understanding of that noble fight, of the solemnity of that death. Back to those first spring days in the cottage at Carley Weir, to the daffodils in the garden —and then back to Carley House, to a spring twilight, the sky flecked with crimson and the distant sea murmuring and vast, when she and Geoffry Carnifex had leaned on the stone wall side by side and watched the puppies at supper.

So the summer began to slip away.

One morning, in early August, Leonida found unexpected news in a letter from John Ashburton.

"Dear little lady, how goes it with you?" it ran. "I am coming to see for myself, as advancing years teach me what unsatisfactory things letters are. After a stupid season in town, a German cure, and a cruise with some particularly boresome people on their particularly unsteady yacht, I have finally brought up just near you, at Ouchy. The Ludovic Widmores have a villa here; I am stopping with them. They are charming, but so are you, and I don't like their cook. My man has telephoned to your hotel and finds I can get rooms, so I shall arrive the end of the week. If all goes well, I shall stay—unobtrusively, believe me—and enjoy myself. If, *au contraire*, you are bored with me or Naler does not think the housemaids sufficiently pretty, I shall meekly transfer my quarters farther up the lake, to Vevey, where I can enjoy the same outlook as you, without the feeling that some one is by who finds me middle-aged and stupid.

"My compliments to your grandmother;

even her kindness will not induce her to remember me after the lapse of years since we met.

"Yours always,

"JOHN ASHBURTON."

Leonida read the letter at once to her grandmother.

"I am so pleased he is coming," she said. "It will be nice to have news from home."

Lady Marweir was stretched on her sofa, fanning herself lazily. She glanced suspiciously at the girl.

"Is John Ashburton in love with you?" she asked. "It would be an excellent match, Leonida. He has money."

Leonida rose and walked to the side of the sofa, looking down steadily into her grandmother's eyes. She was tearing the letter she held, slowly and methodically.

"Listen, grandmother; you must clearly understand, once and for all, that there neither is nor ever can be any such question between

Mr. Ashburton and me. Our position is perfectly clear and well-defined. You must definitely understand this. If there were any doubt in your mind, or any uncertainty which would allow you to encourage any gossip on the subject, you must say so at once, and I will wire him not to come here. If he is here purely as my friend and yours, it will be a great pleasure to me. Otherwise it is impossible."

Lady Marweir took out her handkerchief. "Dear me, Leonida, I'm only thinking of your happiness. I haven't seen him for centuries; but he's fearfully smart, and every one says he's charming. I do hope the Paris Herald will say that he dines every night at our table. It sounds well. Oh, dear! Well, perhaps if he asks you, you'll change your mind."

The girl hesitated a moment. Then she spoke:

"I have already refused to marry Mr. Ashburton, grandmother. It must end there."

Lady Marweir was silent, from sheer aston-

ishment. Perhaps it was wise. In the bottom of her heart she was conscious that she was a little afraid of Leonida.

"Well, dear, of course it's very flattering," she said at last. "At any rate, he's certain to invite us to tea in the afternoon while he's here, so that will save a little money. I'm very glad he's coming, I'm sure."

Leonida bit her lip, and did not answer.

On the afternoon of John's arrival, she was sewing in the garden. They told him at the hotel where she was to be found, and he went at once in search of her. She was sitting under some spreading fir-trees, her white dress and her dark head silhouetted against the summer sky. A flash of pleasure lit her grave young face as she rose to greet him.

"Dear, dear me!" laughed John, catching both her hands in his, "how ridiculously glad I am to see you!"

"And I to see you. Only I don't know why it's ridiculous."

"It isn't ridiculous in you, but only in me.

I am old enough, by this time, to know that the charming welcome your answer to my note gave me was probably not genuine. Never mind. It is summer, it is lovely weather, and we are alive!"

Leonida made room for him on her bench.

"I have so many questions that I want to ask you that I don't know where to begin," John went on, seating himself beside her and scrutinising her carefully with his keen, flashing eyes. "First of all, how do you find your grandmother?"

"I have not found her entirely, yet," she replied, smiling a little thoughtfully. "She is still under process of being discovered. In return, she is probably still measuring and labeling me. We get along famously. For myself, I have these enchanted gardens and plenty of books."

"And people?"

Leonida laughed again.

"Don't let me discourage you, but when I tell you that your advent is the sensation of

the summer, you will realise how barren Montreux is. No, we are a handful of itinerants, who can't afford Ouchy or a cure. We pretend that we have come here through the recommendation of some friend, who has a title but no discrimination. The lady who has the entresol rooms, with a balcony, goes in to dinner first. We idle away our days, only herding together when the omnibus arrives with new victims; then we gossip about them, and classify them by their clothes and according as to whether or no they can afford coffee after dinner. I've been very content, though."

John was silent for a moment. "I see I shall have to get to know you all over again," he remarked finally. "You've changed."

Her hands moved slowly toward the sewing in her lap, and she sighed. "I've had responsibility. But now you must do some talking. How is the doctor?"

"Tom is very well. He has spent the summer bending over microbes in his laboratory. Having a few weeks of holiday, he decided

to devote them to pathology as lightly as I would go yachting. He is a wonderful man, but he would be far more wonderful if he didn't take himself so seriously. It is a good thing to work; but it always seems to me a great thing to know how to work and to play too."

"I think," said Leonida, "that what I admire most about him is his capacity for detail. He notices literally everything, in his quiet way. His brain is so well ordered and so methodically arranged, too. He was the first person who taught me to have a tidy mind, if you know what I mean."

John laughed. "I know very well, my dear young lady. I myself am a mental old maid. I have all my ideas neatly pigeonholed in a cut and dried manner, and they are fast becoming dusty."

"Yet you and he are so different!"

"Yes, we are different. So different that we interest each other extremely. We have always said that if he had discovered any

commonplace points of resemblance between us, our affection would have sunk to mediocrity. As it is, here we are; no longer young, not yet old; no longer brilliant, nor yet entirely tiresome. Wait until that term middle-aged can be applied to you, Leonida. Only those who benefit by it can appreciate its blessed vagueness!"

"I think I should say," remarked Leonida, smiling, "that the difference between you is that life has rounded the doctor's corners and sharpened yours."

How like her mother she looked, John Ashburton suddenly thought. How she was developing—and yet how her enthusiasm and her girlishness clung to her.

"I *am* sharpened, Leonida, if you will," he said, after a moment's pause. "Tell me, are you still an optimist?"

The girl's mouth set, and her eyes darkened a little.

"I will tell you what these months have done for me," she responded. "I have been close

to both joy and sorrow. I have seen both loss and gain—both failure and success. Above all, I have been studying in the school of little things. I have calculated to a nice point how my bread is to be provided and what practical difficulties I may have to face. I have seen how small one's actions may be, and how dreary the wear and tear of years on one's enthusiasms. It has all taught me this." She turned toward him and fixed her eyes intently on his. "The sorrow has only shown me how great can be the joy. The mistakes have only proved how lasting can be the successes. The petty has but thrown the large into relief. Perhaps it is a heritage from my mother that I should strive to forget the suffering of life in its gain. Yes, Mr. Ashburton, I think I am an optimist."

John arranged to dine at Lady Marweir's table that night, and met that lady in the hall, just before dinner, as she was waiting for Leonida to appear. He introduced himself to

her with his usual quiet ease, yet she had an uncomfortable feeling that the sharp eyes behind his invariable glasses had instantly found out how badly her hair was dyed.

"This is a great pleasure, Mr. Ashburton," she assured him volubly. "Leonida has spoken of you so often. Dear child, how lovely she is looking, isn't she?"

"I don't think she *looks* lovely, my dear Countess," returned John, smiling—he had divined at once that this was the sort of woman who would like to be addressed as "Countess." "I think she *is* lovely."

"Of course, of course. My family have always been handsome. Black and white are so becoming to her. It will not be long before she leaves me, I am afraid. How nice the Carnifexes have been to her, haven't they? Is Carrie Carnifex still pretty? I never knew her well. Living in London and on the Continent, except for the season, one sees so little of people who are not in one's own set. One of my boys was once devoted to her, but I

discouraged it. Her nose was always bourgeois. Did you know my son, Viscount Blye, before he succeeded my husband?"

"Yes, I have had that pleasure."

"Poor boy, he made a most unlucky match. Quite a nonentity, I assure you. My children have all disappointed me. And as to their drains on my income—if it had not been for my natural affection, I should not be here now." And Lady Marweir sighed. "You can not conceive, Mr. Ashburton, what it is to a woman of my sensitive nature to associate with such people as one sees here."

John did not answer. He was watching Leonida, who was approaching them from the other side of the hall. She was very tall and slender in her soft black dress, a single white rose pinned at her belt, and her whole air one of quiet, almost grave, refinement. He turned to look at Lady Marweir's obviously cotton-backed blue satin and her string of huge wax pearls; and he sighed, as he followed the grandmother and granddaughter in to dinner.

Lady Marweir began to enjoy herself. Several people at the long, vulgar, promiscuous table d'hôte had turned and stared excitedly at the distinguished-looking man at the Countess of Marweir's private table; and she had taken special care to remark to an acquaintance, in the lift, that her friend Mr. Ashburton had just been stopping with Lord Ludovic Widmore, the Premier's son, at Ouchy. Presently, too, John ordered some champagne, and her spirits rose still higher. She turned, in surprise, to Leonida, as the girl, with an almost studied carelessness, refused the wine.

"Why don't you take some, dear, since Mr. Ashburton is so kind? It isn't bad for the complexion, and you seem tired. She does too much, entirely too much, Mr. Ashburton, and I shall look to you to be very firm with her."

"I do not care for any wine, thank you," said Leonida quietly. A sudden sharpness had crept into her voice. "And you know it

is bad for your digestion, grandmother. I should not risk taking any more, if I were you."

She was very silent for the rest of the meal. Just before they rose to leave the table, Lady Marweir noted the fact.

"You look so grave, Leonida," she exclaimed pettishly. "It isn't natural in a girl of your years. You've got your poor dear mother's unfortunate nature. Goodness knows what I've suffered with my children, Mr. Ashburton!" Her voice grew tearful and she took out her handkerchief, forgetting to hold it so that John could not see its coarse cotton and imitation lace. "My life has been one long misery. I'm sure no mother ever sacrificed as much as I. There has not been a single degradation or disgrace that I have not undergone——"

Leonida rose suddenly. She was very white in the glare of the electric light.

"Come, grandmother!" she said, with still that curious sharpness in her voice. "We

have quite finished, and the air will be pleasanter outside."

John lingered behind for a moment, to give some order. When he went after them into the entrance-hall, Leonida was waiting for him alone.

"My grandmother has a headache, and has gone to her room for the rest of the evening," she said mechanically. "I am going up to her for a few moments, to see that she is comfortable. Will you meet me here, in about ten minutes from now? I want to say something to you."

John found some words rising impulsively to his lips; but she turned quickly from him and disappeared.

When they met again, a few moments later, he felt a sort of dread at the strange look in her face. There was something in it that spoke of Catherine Montedonico.

She carried a shawl in her hand, and she let him put it around her. Then she moved toward the door.

"Come," she said, "let us go into the gardens; we can be quiet there."

The night was very still, brilliantly star-lit, with no moon. They walked down the dark paths to the edge of the lake, and the bench where they had talked in the afternoon sunshine. Leonida seated herself, drawing her shawl about her as if she were chilly. There was no sound save the lap of the water against the stones. Suddenly she turned to him.

"You made a mistake in what you did."

"Yes," John answered slowly, "I made a miserable, thoughtless, cruel mistake. Forgive me, Leonida."

She threw back her head, and looked up at the sky.

"There is nothing to forgive. It—it is that she is not very strong. There is only a great deal to pity." She laid her hand on his arm. "Mr. Ashburton, you knew my mother. You knew how loving I tried to be to her. Sometimes now I say to myself that I, who would be most tender, am growing hard—desper-

ately hard. Do—do you think my manner is unkind? You see—we will never speak of these things again—only—I am so young and ignorant, and advice would help me so much."

"No, little lady, I don't think you are hard."

"I try so hard," Leonida went on sadly, "to see the right; and I know that my duty is to be very true, and very tender. I am glad you do not think me hard. We must never speak of it again; only don't—don't——"

"No—I understand," John replied gently.

A silence fell upon them. Leonida closed her eyes. She listened wearily to the beat of the water on the stones. It was so soothing and cool, so dark and quiet!

John broke the stillness. His voice was as clear and strong as ever, but he spoke in an unnaturally low tone.

"Leonida," he said, "I do not think that a mistake I once made in regard to you in England need make us, necessarily, strangers. In fact, I like to feel that we are good friends.

Don't you think you could put your head down, and cry—for a little?"

He saw her breast rise and fall suddenly; her hands tightened about each other convulsively. She turned to him with a sad little smile, her eyes swimming, and the tears raining down her cheeks.

Lady Marweir kept her room more and more as the days went on. She would appear sometimes late in the afternoon, and gossip to John Ashburton of her past glories and her present fall. But she decreased in energy so visibly that Leonida encouraged her to remain up-stairs, and tried to while away the hours for her as best she could. John kept them plentifully supplied with flowers, and the girl arranged a comfortable sofa by their single window which had a view, and piled it with soft, pretty cushions. A week after John's advent the old lady left her room scarcely at all, but was content to have Leonida read to her from the society papers, and brush her hair

by the hour. Her requirements were very arduous, for her maid had left her for unpaid wages, and she was growing more and more weak and exacting day by day. Her splendid spirit was beginning to fail her, and her tired mind was weary of pretending, even to herself.

John Ashburton, however, was quietly enjoying himself. He had a fund of good books, and Leonida was free to be with him for at least a couple of hours each day. She had at first smilingly urged him to move on to some place less boresome; but he could see the relief his presence gave her. Weary from her long confinement in her grandmother's room —for she carried Lady Marweir's meals to her every day and shared them—she would come to him in the middle of the afternoon, and they would make small excursions together or take long walks, until dinner time, when the countess stirred from her rest and had to be amused for the evening. John could feel how the mental relaxation and the change of scene

reacted on the girl during these hours of freedom. There was always a less set look about her lips, and a line less in her forehead.

The extra comforts and medicines for Lady Marweir deducted a large item from her pitiful income. Leonida's great struggle was, however, that all money considerations should be spared her grandmother now; and she carefully concealed her account book, and cut down her own expenditures in every possible way. Some dresses which Lady Carnifex had given her, and one or two small trinkets disappeared, too, about this time. Finally the old countess realised that the girl was wearing the same black frock with remarkable persistency. She had never altogether sacrificed her hopes of a match with John Ashburton—it made her quite content in her invalidism to think how much the two were, perforce, thrown together — and she knew from her worldly experience how much dress counted for.

"Why don't you wear another frock than

that, Leonida?" she asked one day, as the girl came in to darken her room and arrange her for the afternoon nap. She was dressed in the same black dress which she wore morning, noon, and night; and her hat and sunshade were the last of her slim stock. "You go out every afternoon in that hat, too. Mr. Ashburton will be growing sick of it."

Leonida smiled. "I don't think he notices, grandmother. My—my other things are pretty well worn out."

"All the better," retorted the old lady promptly. "The last time I was in a shop here I saw a lovely white linen, evidently from Paris, and priced most ridiculously low. I want you to have it."

Leonida was silent.

"To be sure," Lady Marweir went on, searching for her handkerchief, with a presage of coming tears—"to be sure, I suppose I shall have to go without that peignoir, if you get it. Did you see it in the window at Mauclin's, Leonida? It's a lovely shell pink—

chiffon, you know. Pink has always been becoming to me. Oh, dear, what does it matter, anyway? I'm a changed woman, and my skin's completely gone. If my children hadn't made me sacrifice every moment of my life to them, I wouldn't be at a loss for a decent peignoir now——"

The scene began in earnest. It was some time before Leonida could dry her grandmother's tears, and then she rubbed the tired head until the old lady slept. It took an hour from her afternoon freedom, and she looked paler than usual as she joined John Ashburton down-stairs.

He glanced at her keenly.

"What was the matter, Leonida?"

They were standing on the steps of the hotel. She turned her face away, and absorbed herself in opening her parasol, that he might not see her lips quiver.

"Nothing. Grandmother didn't go to sleep quite as promptly as usual."

"Have you noticed," said John, as they

walked along, "what a glorious afternoon this is? Look at the blue of the lake and rejoice, Leonida! If I could start life over again, I'd be a woman, and have blue eyes. But now I must tell you where I'm going to take you today. For long, that spidery funiculaire has fascinated me, and Naler the all-powerful has discovered that it goes up to a place called Mont Pélérin, where there is a hotel and a view. The hotel, please heaven, includes tea. Come on!"

Leaning back in the little car of the funicular railway, watching the town, the vineyards, and the lake spread more widely before her every moment, Leonida drew a long breath and began to feel rested. A cool breeze freshened the afternoon heat as they rose higher, and one or two distant peaks seemed to come into nearer view.

They got out at a small wayside station, and started for their walk to the hotel over a good mountain road. It was bordered on one side by a low wall, and John made Leonida com-

fortable on it as soon they found a particularly lovely spot, and leaned against the wall beside her. Below them, the rippling green terraces graduated in endless waves. Below that again were the houses of Montreux, white against the margin of infinite blue. A red glory of August afternoon sunshine blazed on Chillon, and the caps of the Dents du Midi were beginning to turn a faint rose color.

Leonida was silent for a few moments.

"Don't you despise yourself," she asked suddenly, "when you see anything as vast and grand and beautiful as this?"

John laughed. "For goodness' sake, Leonida, don't talk like Rufus Carnifex! No, I never despise myself. I reserve patronage of that sort for other people."

"By the way," Leonida pursued, smiling, "I want to hear about the Carnifexes. You've told me scarcely anything of them since you came. Dear Lady Carnifex, how kind she is!"

"Yes. She is a woman whose heart is in inverse ratio to her brain. I haven't seen

much of them, except when I've run down to Tom for week-ends. Geoffry is doing famously in the west, I hear. He's one of the finest specimens I know, Geoffry Carnifex. Steady, straightforward—and yet not stupid, as men of his type usually are. He always makes me think of a keen, cold, clear day. He's doing splendid work, they say, and is the most popular man on the ranch. His father wants him to come home for some holidays this autumn, but Geoffry won't hear of it. He's fallen head over heels in love with the life, and can't bear the thought of leaving. He's a trump! If ever I have nervous prostration from listening to Carrie or talking to Rufus, I shall send for Geoffry, and the mere sight of him will revive me."

Leonida laughed; and in after years John remembered that her laugh had been a little forced.

"What about Rufus?"

He paused a moment before he answered her.

"Rufus is changing. You left him a pedant, and you will find him a scholar. There were two distinct possibilities for Rufus. Either he would have gotten over his religious mania and become a cheap imitation of Geoffry, or he would have lost his frills, dug underneath to solid ground, and begun to work in earnest. The book was bound to be either a phase or a fixture. He has in both cases chosen the latter course. He will never be interesting, and his books will never sell; but his work will be thoroughly and carefully done. Sincerity excuses a multitude of sins."

"Poor Rufus!" Leonida said, a little sadly. "He always strikes me as not being human enough."

"Yet I know no one with more human failings. He is dogmatic, he is egotistical, he is vain, he is sensitive. True, he has always greatly suffered from comparison with Geoffry. He is small and Geoffry is big, in every way. And the sad part is, that whatever work and however creditable work Rufus does, his

chief title to fame will be that of Geoffry's brother."

"You know you and I have always disagreed a little about Rufus," she answered, smiling. "You look upon him as an unconditional bore; I, on the contrary, think him an unusually determined and rather fine man. I have been forced into admiration, time and time again——"

"*Not* of the Retrogression of Modern Christianity, Leonida!"

"No, not of the book itself, but of the effort that is making it. With every one and everything—with even his own sense of humor, if he has one, latent somewhere—against him, Rufus is determinedly going on. I call it rather fine, as I say; perhaps, because it is such a contrast to myself. I lean so weakly to the beautiful and the attractive and the poetic side of life; and Rufus, with his grim, dogged, Puritan—uninteresting, if you will—resolve, makes me a trifle ashamed of myself."

"Dear child, you have idealised Rufus be-

cause, in our circle of idlers, he is the only worker!"

"I admire people who accomplish things."

"Then I pray God," said John crossly, "that you may never admire me. Rufus's determination doesn't cancel the fact that he's a fool."

"Well, I reverse your judgment. With me his determination overcomes his foolishness."

"Strawberries, even when cried by pedlars in the street, are still strawberries," retorted John. "But when they are served they are generally grimy and unattractive."

Leonida was thoughtful for a moment.

"Do not rail at Rufus until you have seen into his heart," she observed slowly. "Good as you all were, you were none of you as tender as he to me when mother died. He was the first, and the readiest. He seems to understand suffering, somehow. I think he has a wonderful gift of sympathy. Yet"—she broke off suddenly—"yet I pity Rufus more than almost any one I know."

"So do I. First of all, to a nature like his, our dear Lady Carnifex is exquisite torture. And she does sum him up so deliciously! There is a woman, Leonida, with that most extraordinary thing—a sense of humor of which she is not conscious. The consequence is that it never does her any good, and yet she is always amusing other people vastly."

They were silent for a while. John's thoughts went, involuntarily, back to a Sunday in England, when he had leaned against a wall such as this at Carley Weir and talked with Catherine Montedonico. Had she realised then what Leonida would come to mean to him? He smiled a little, as he remembered her fear of his influencing the girl; and he took up the conversation suddenly again, to prevent himself from wondering how much Leonida had influenced him.

"We all," he said, "are so queer that we make the world a perfect sixpenny museum of oddities!"

She smiled—her smile was so close to that

smile of her mother's, always "a little too grave."

"And what do you call life itself?"

"Life, my dear Leonida, is the process of elimination. It is the sifting of the gold from the dross. It is the selection of the fit from the unfit. Knowing one's own self is the key to it; and its climax is to understand what is necessary, and to let the rest go by."

"Do you live by this precept?"

"Good heavens, no!" exclaimed John, taking out his watch. "Expounding a creed is more fun than believing in it. I don't intend to start a church and name it after myself—the first church of John the Cynic, or anything of the sort. I'm too level-headed to be a fanatic, and not good-looking enough to run a Sunday-school. But at present I would barter even my faith in you for a cup of tea."

The view from the hotel terrace was magnificent, and Leonida reveled in it, while John drank some tea, which he pronounced execrable, and talked on to amuse her. He seemed

to have the knack of resting her and controlling her thoughts. He saw that what she needed now, above all things, was relaxation and amusement, and he set to work, with a quiet steadiness of purpose, to accomplish his end.

The last rays of the sun had died, and one or two stars were glowing through the purple twilight, when they left the railway at Montreux and slowly walked homeward. Leonida sighed suddenly, and turned to John.

"I don't know why I enjoy our afternoons so much," she said, half laughing.

"Oh, don't spare me," he answered humbly. "I have long since discovered that the people who pretend to think me good company only ask me to dinner when every other man in London has given out."

"I shall not see you again to-night," Leonida went on, pausing for a moment at the hotel door, and holding out her hand. "I must stay with grandmother. But I shall be

thinking of this afternoon, and blessing you for it. Good night!"

That evening, as Leonida was reading the social items in the Sketch to her grandmother, a box was brought in. Lady Marweir seized it triumphantly.

"There, my dear! I sent down this afternoon and ordered the white linen dress for you. Here it is. Oh, you needn't wait, boy. You can leave the bill. Say that the Countess of Marweir will send a check for it tomorrow."

Leonida hesitated a moment; then she signed to the man to wait.

"I will pay you now," she said, as she drew out her purse. "Grandmother, that was more than sweet of you."

"Oh, bother!" retorted Lady Marweir briskly. "Why do you pay him now, Leonida? Hurry, and try it on."

When the man had gone, the girl slipped her arm about the old lady and kissed her.

"That was more than sweet of you!" she repeated, her voice quivering a little.

"My dear child, I'm sure my generous, good heart is what has ruined me. Do try it on!"

"I will go into my own room and fit it," Leonida answered evasively. "The—the glass is better there."

When she returned, a few moments later, she was in her dressing-gown, however.

"Grandmother," she laughed, "I've an awful piece of news for you. It doesn't fit!"

"What!" cried Lady Marweir.

"No, it's quite impossible. Nothing can be done to it. I'm afraid you'll have to let me take it down in the morning and exchange it for that peignoir you saw."

"Well, my dear, I'm sorry. Still, the peignoir will be very useful, and I do need it frightfully!"

II

JOHN BEGINS TO SCORE

II

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If John Ashburton and Leonida had not seen so much of each other at this time of their lives they would probably have fallen in love. He was not too old, even, and she was still young enough—for it is inverse ratio with man and woman—to have deceived themselves very successfully. But the details of breakfast, lunch, and dinner are the greatest levelers in the world. John was clever enough to see this; and he was also clever enough to take thankfully the friendship which came, and not try to turn it into the sentiment which could never be.

The weeks sped on, and gorgeous August died away. With the early days of the Swiss autumn came one or two light falls of snow, and the Rochers de Naye and the Dents du

Midi began to look aged and hoary. The weather was clear and cold, and apt to be very lovely.

One night in early September, Lady Marweir had a stroke of paralysis. She barely had time to call Leonida to her, before she fell helplessly to the floor. Leonida aroused a doctor in the hotel, and together they worked over the prostrate form, with its pinched, gray face and its pitiful dyed hair, until dawn. Then the girl sent for John Ashburton, and he hurried into Montreux, to try to secure an English nurse.

In the middle of the morning the old lady was quite conscious and fairly comfortable. For the first time Leonida left her, and went into her own room with the doctor.

"Now, tell me!" she said quietly.

The man shrugged his shoulders, with a Gallic protestation against the suffering of life.

"She will never walk again, mademoiselle. You see that for yourself. It is the whole left

side. Yet she may—she probably will—live for many months. She has the remains of strong health and of a great will, Madame La Comtesse."

Lady Marweir slept most of the day; and the English nurse arrived and was installed. John inspected her carefully. She was a middle-aged, gray-haired woman, with a strong face and kindly eyes. He had a few words with her in private; then he sent for Leonida to come down to the garden and have tea with him.

"A breath of air will do you good," he said, meeting her at their old bench by the lake. "And I went to the *patisserie* and bought all the cakes I could find with pink icing. I know you like pink icing; I hate it."

Leonida laughed wearily. "I would like anything! I have had a cup of coffee and a stale roll since midnight."

"Your grandmother needs a nurse, and you need a keeper," went on John energetically, as he handed her her tea. "I am going to be

keeper for the present. What a good thing that this hotel stays open all the winter, Leonida! It is a splendid altitude, and sure to help her. Here we are sitting out of doors to-day. I suppose it wiser for you to keep on here?"

She passed her hand over her eyes as if she were trying to concentrate her thoughts. "Yes, I think so. We had better stop here—for the present. I started this morning to telegraph my uncle, Lord Marweir, you know, in London; but grandmother was conscious then, and she would not let me. She said he only would not come, and that would put her in such a temper that she would die outright."

"How marvelous her spirit is! But, Leonida, my dear child, you must face ahead a little. Suppose—something happens?" John's heart smote him as he spoke. She seemed so utterly alone and unprotected.

"Then I should go to the English pension here, and stay for the winter—or at least

until I could find some object in my life. You see, I am twenty-one in a few weeks, and I have more than enough money to manage alone on. Don't worry, Mr. Ashburton; and, above all, don't stay on here indefinitely. You admitted yourself that you had never missed the beginning of the shooting until this year."

John laughed. "But, my dear Leonida, didn't you know I had arranged to go next week? And now you must hear the tragedy that has befallen me. Naler the invincible, Naler, my faithful mentor, without whom I am as a child without its nurse, fell the whole length of the back-stairs this morning and sprained his ankle. It isn't serious, only slow; and I can no more do without him than I can buy a Swiss railway ticket. No, I'm afraid I'm tied to Naler's ankle for the present, and a good part of the future."

Leonida glanced at him the least bit suspiciously. Had he done this to obviate the possibility of any talk in the hotel, and any

annoyance to her? But his eyes were as steady and keen as ever as they met hers.

"And now from whom do you suppose I had a telephone this morning? From Lady Carnifex! She's at Caux—just above here, on the mountain, you know. She rang me up to ask how you were, and when you and I would come up to luncheon. She says she was at Aix, having dragged the two Rufuses there after supreme efforts, but one day she saw the sweetest skating-dress there at Redfern's, and she bought it on the spot, and of course she had to use it, so she came to Caux, because they heard it was high and cold, and a very smart hotel, and she supposed of course there would be skating, but now she finds there won't be any for two good months; and anyway she doesn't know how to skate. When I could interrupt, I told her about poor Lady Marweir, and she was most sympathetic, and wanted to come down to you at once. I said I was sure that you were better without visitors for the present; and then she really made

the most excellent suggestion. It was that, in a short time, when you have gotten to know the nurse, you should run up to Caux and spend a few days with her, for the change and rest. You could always be reached by telephone and could get back here in an hour; and I shall have to stay on here anyway, on account of that benedetto Naler. I would have a careful eye to things; the doctor, too, assured me this afternoon there was no change likely in your grandmother for many days to come. Lady Carnifex also said that if you didn't come up to see her, Rufus the erudite would come down to see you, which"—John shook his head gloomily—"God forbid!"

Leonida burst out laughing. "Well, it is very good of her, and if all is well I shall certainly go. Don't be too hard on Rufus, though. Your coming was an event; his would only be an incident."

"Now, Leonida, don't flatter the aged! You know well that to be an event in my tenderest point. I would rather be dead than common-

place. By the way, Lady Carnifex says that she is quite convinced that Rufus is in love with you. I am glad he is growing human."

Leonida had risen to go in. She turned aside and smiled, rather absently, before she answered.

"Don't place any stock in Lady Carnifex's romances. She thought once that Geoffry was in love with me."

John was silent. He watched the smoke of his cigarette curl upward in the crisp, cold air. "I think myself that it is a pity that Geoffry wasn't in love with you," he said at last; "but—he wasn't!"

Lady Marweir continued in very much the same condition as the next days passed. The doctor's prediction that no change was imminent seemed about to be fulfilled. As for Leonida, she grew so startlingly pale, and John urged the visit to Caux so insistently, that she finally gave way; and one afternoon the two set out, Leonida leaving many final

injunctions with her grandmother's nurse, and John reassuring her in every possible way.

The Carnifexes met them at the station at Caux, and gave them a warm welcome. Leonida vaguely felt it a comfort to have some woman to talk to again, and she held little Lady Carnifex's hand very tightly as they entered the hotel. The vast, brilliant place, with its lights and its music and its perfect appointments, gave her somehow a feeling of rest and pleasure; and John noticed, as they drew around a table in the hall for afternoon tea, that her cheeks were tinged with color and her eyes were brighter.

"Isn't this perfectly lovely!" cried Lady Carnifex, beaming on the circle. "Here we are all together again—except Geoffry, and goodness only knows where he is, in some terrible mountains or somewhere——"

"Mother," broke in Rufus, handing Leonida some cake with elaborate care, "don't you understand that Geoffry is on the plains, not in the mountains?"

"Oh, well, my dear, it doesn't make any difference whether it's plains or mountains, when it's at that distance. I want him here. Geoffry's so nice to travel with, Mr. Ashburton—you can't think how nice. All the girls fall in love with him. Leonida, my dear child, take some more cake! Now, I want to hear everything. It's a perfect mercy your grandmother's just the same. We'll send you back so fat and rosy, and meanwhile we'll give you such a good time that your head will be turned. This is an awfully nice hotel, isn't it? And the food is so good. There are lots of people one knows stopping here. I suppose you heard that the Widmores are here, didn't you, Mr. Ashburton?"

John had been spied out by several people congregated in the hall, and, with a little apology to Lady Carnifex, he went to speak to them.

"It's too wonderful the way he's run after, that man!" she exclaimed to Leonida. "They say he knows more people than any one in

Europe. When I first heard that he was at Montreux, of course I said he was in love with you. But then I realised he was far too punctilious to stay on if he really did care for you. And now his man has sprained his ankle, and everything! He was always supposed to be in love with Alice Treherne, you know—Mrs. Tommy Treherne."

She rattled on, telling Leonida who the people that passed were, commenting on their frocks, and diverting the girl intensely. There was something very lovable about her, kind, pretty, luxurious little Lady Carnifex; when Leonida went up to her room she found a lovely black chiffon gown laid out on the bed for her, and beside it a cluster of gardenias from Sir Rufus. There had been nothing forgotten.

They were a very merry party at dinner. Even Rufus unbent a little, and contradicted his mother with more spirit than usual.

"Isn't it horrid that Mr. Ashburton will go down to Montreux to-night?" said Lady Car-

nifex, beating time on the table to a gay French valse. "We could have so much more fun if he stayed. Sir Rufus hates all this, you know, Leonida, and so does young Rufus, too. Never mind, you and I will enjoy ourselves. I think men are awfully selfish, anyway."

"My dear Lady Carnifex," protested John, sipping his champagne with evident enjoyment, "don't be so hard on us! Remember how unselfish I have been in my life. I have pitied your lovely sex so much that I have foregone marriage."

"You would have been divorced by now if you had married. You never could have stood a lot of crying babies and economy and a bad cook. And that's almost always what marriage means. You're the kind of man who likes a good meal, but won't stand knowing how it's prepared. Not that I mean to discourage you two young people. I think marriage is perfectly sweet, don't you, Mr. Ashburton?"

"Yes—except when it's perfectly sour!" said John tartly.

"Oh, don't be cynical or clever. I don't know which is worse, cynicism or cleverness. Have you ever noticed how many disagreeable things begin with C? Cynicism and cleverness and cheapness and cold and cloves and chickenpox—it's quite extraordinary."

"What an original idea! You must write a book, Lady Carnifex, of alphabetically divided sensations. By the way, Rufus, how is your book?"

Rufus, who had been explaining to Leonida, at elaborate length, of what pigments the paint on the dining-room walls must be composed, turned.

"My book? Why, it is progressing, thanks, slowly progressing. I can't say that I see the end in sight yet, but I suppose I must not be too impatient. Yet the interest is more absorbing than ever, and the subject more engrossing. I often think"—he smiled a little sadly—"that when I die the record of my life

may be found in those pages. It is, and has been, and will be, my supreme effort. And when it is complete I shall have reached the prime of my manhood."

Leonida and John Ashburton glanced at each other. A certain strength which comes only from labor seemed to have come to Rufus.

"I hope you'll finish it before you're an old man," Sir Rufus grunted sceptically, turning his attention from his dinner for a moment.

"Oh, my dear Rufus, the boy can't grow much older than he is now!" said Lady Carnifex huffily. "Why, he's seventy-five already. But what is youth, after all? Only a question of a good skin or a bad."

"I think," put in Leonida, "that youth and age are a question of ideals. As Emerson says, in the heyday of youth and poetry we see that idealism may be true; then the face of life waxes stern and grand, and we see that it *must* be true."

"And I think youth is a question of futile kicks, and age is a matter of *agréments*," said

John, smiling. "But since Rufus's book will undoubtedly give him the development he wants, since Leonida still has her ideals, since Lady Carnifex's skin is as charming as ever —and since I, poor fool, have long since made my *agréments,* what does it matter, after all?"

After they had their coffee, Leonida and the two Rufuses wrapped up and went out to see the moonlight on the lake below. John professed he would enjoy it during his trip back to Montreux, and preferred to sit and have a final chat with Lady Carnifex in the warm, bright hall.

"I think the moon is lovely, of course," that lady began, when they were comfortably settled, and she had gotten her chair in the glow of a becoming light; "but when you go out to see a thing that way it's always disappointing, don't you think? Sort of made to order, I mean. And then the wind blows my hair. Now do tell me about that terrible old Lady Marweir, Mr. Ashburton."

John examined the ash of his cigar critically. "My dear lady, you see for yourself how tired Leonida looks, and you can easily guess that her life isn't particularly joyful. I have seen Lady Marweir only three or four times since I came. We all dined together the night of my arrival, and she began to feel ill that very evening, I remember. She appeared only once or twice after that."

"They tell the most awful stories of her in London," said Lady Carnifex in an awe-struck whisper. "Drink and morphine, and I don't know what all. That poor darling child! What are we to do, Mr. Ashburton? Her mother never could have known the truth, or she wouldn't have wanted Leonida to be with her grandmother."

"I'm not so sure. Madame Montedonico had a strong idea of duty, and the old countess is clearly some one's duty."

"But Leonida is so young and so lovely, and she puts on her clothes so well! Oh, dear, I wish she would come and live with me!"

"You seem to forget," John objected, smiling, "that you have two sons."

"It would be the best thing that ever happened to Rufus, if she'd marry him. But she won't. No self-respecting woman would marry a man who knows so little about frocks. Why, he wouldn't care if I wore things that were made three seasons ago, really he wouldn't. Now, Geoffry's quite different. He is dreadfully fussy about what looks well and what doesn't. Once he ran up a dreadful bill at his tailor's, too, when he was very young. But I didn't mind. I wish Rufus would do something like that."

"I really should have had sons," said John. "I should so have enjoyed teaching them to dress well. And daughters, too, for that matter."

"You are not too old!" Lady Carnifex retorted jocosely.

"No, but I am too wise!"

"I have often wondered if you'd have been as nice if you had married."

"If I had married, people would have called me flirtatious, whereas, as it is, I am simply called agreeable. There is a vast difference. If I had married, I would have been a simile; as it is, I am a hyperbole, verging on bathos."

"I am not sure what bathos is," said Lady Carnifex cautiously; "but it sounds like a kind of bath soap."

John laughed; then suddenly he looked up. "When is Geoffry coming home?"

"Oh, I don't know, I'm sure. I don't believe for a good year yet, though. There isn't any woman, so far as I can make out; he's simply mad about the horses and the life. I do wish he were at home. I miss him dreadfully. There is no one in the world quite like Geoffry."

"It is a pity that he is not coming home," John murmured, half under his breath. "A great, great pity. Well, my dear Lady Carnifex, my time is growing short. The last train for Montreux starts in half an hour. And here come those star-gazers, by the way.

I hate to leave you all, but I dare not desert my prostrate Naler. He has a pill or something to take before he goes to sleep; and if I don't write out a reminder for him, on a conspicuous piece of paper, I find he forgets it. Did you ever hear of a pill for a sprained ankle?"

"Oh, well, you can't tell." Lady Carnifex shook her head wisely. "Science is so awfully clever, don't you think? I suppose it works down to his ankle while he's asleep, in some way. Leonida, my dear, I hope you didn't catch cold!"

Leonida and John had a few words alone, in a quiet corner of the hall, before he started.

"Now, you're not going to be lonely?" he asked, as he drew on his gloves.

She glanced up at him, with a worn, tired little smile, and he saw that her eyes were swimming with tears. "I shall miss you," she said simply. "I've grown to depend on you, Mr. Ashburton. You'll telephone if there is the slightest change?"

"Of course. And you will find a lot to amuse you here. Lady Ludovic Widmore, a great friend of mine, is going to speak to you to-morrow. By the way, do you see the difference I mean in Rufus? It's quite interesting, and worth observing."

"Yes," said Leonida thoughtfully.

"I wonder how it will end?" went on John. "In cases like this, the subject doesn't count, and the work he puts into it does. He is quite right in saying it is his process of development, the book. I am somewhat going over to your way of thinking, Leonida. He is doing a boresome task rather finely. He does not care for opinion, he wants truth. The great question to my prosaic mind is, will he ever finish it? It may turn out one of those sad cases, the uninteresting respectability of labor without the dignity of achievement."

III

THE RETROGRESSION OF MODERN CHRISTIANITY

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THAT night at Caux always stood out in Leonida's memory. She slept very little, and finally, just before dawn, she wrapped herself in her dressing-gown and drew a chair to the window. The stars had not quite died, and looked strangely wan and brilliant in the deep purple. Wreaths of cloud hung low upon the mountains, and a great calm seemed drawn over the sleeping world. Every now and then a cow-bell tinkled from a distant pasture; otherwise the stillness was unbroken. Almost involuntarily, the girl sank on her knees and prayed.

A sharp knock came on her door at seven o'clock. Before Leonida could answer it, she knew what had happened. It was a telephone message from John Ashburton, to say that

Lady Marweir had had another stroke of paralysis shortly after midnight, and that, while conscious, she was sinking rapidly.

They had waked Lady Carnifex, and she came to Leonida at once, with every offer of help and sympathy. Her maid hastily put the girl's things together, and looked out the first train to Montreux; it left in forty minutes, and meanwhile Leonida swallowed a cup of hot coffee, and bade Lady Carnifex farewell.

"I shall be down later in the morning, my dear child. Do look out for yourself! Gray will see you safely into Mr. Ashburton's hands, and you are to keep her as long as you want."

As Leonida and the maid passed through the entrance-hall, Rufus Carnifex hurried after them.

"I am going down with you to Montreux," he said.

Leonida stopped short. "You!"

"Yes; I particularly want to; and I can lose

this morning's work without much inconvenience. I—I could not think of letting you go alone."

"But—indeed, I would rather go just with Gray," said Leonida piteously. "Please do not come."

But Rufus took her cloak from her arm. "I really must insist," he returned obstinately.

At the station he could not find the booking office, and, as Gray did not speak French, Leonida bought the tickets herself. Rufus was dazed and helpless; and, by the delay, they almost lost the train.

John's eyebrows went up as he saw of whom the party consisted at Montreux. There had been no further change, he said. As they were hurrying from the station, Rufus discovered that he had left his overcoat in the train; and, with many explanations, he went back with Gray to try to find it. Leonida could not help smiling as she heard John swear under his breath.

"Rufus might really be dispensed with,

Leonida!" he said sarcastically. "Why on earth did he come?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. But he meant it very kindly, and he has lost a whole morning's work. It does not help to let him irritate one."

"He is an intolerable nuisance!"

"Be careful, Mr. Ashburton! Lady Carnifex told you, you know, that he was in love with me!"

They ran up the hotel steps panting. John laughed, as he tried to get his breath. "Oh, bosh!" he replied cheerfully. "I respect your good judgment too much for that!"

He was a good friend to Leonida that day, John Ashburton. Lady Marweir was perfectly conscious, and not suffering. Pillows of shabby pink silk behind her, a torn lace coverlet over her, her hair carefully arranged, and one quivering hand plucking at the lace at her throat, she fought death all day, with an indomitable spirit worthy of her race and of her past. When the evening began to fall,

her flame of life flickered, and burned low; and, just as the calm, early winter moon was rising, she died.

It was John who did everything. He saved Leonida every possible pain, and shielded her from every detail. Lady Carnifex had arrived from Caux, and put the girl to bed at once, for she was completely exhausted from the strain and excitement. It was arranged that Lady Marweir should be buried in the little English cemetery at Montreux. "Don't cart me back to England!" she had told Leonida. "My visiting list has dwindled so that there would be no one worth speaking of to come to my funeral." So it was settled. And the next morning but one they laid the weary, broken body to rest.

On the afternoon following the funeral, Lady Carnifex, who had settled herself temporarily at the Montreux hotel, sent for John to come to her sitting-room. There he found Leonida awaiting him, alone. She was stretched out on the sofa, a white shawl over

her, and some red roses he had given her on a table beside her. There were great dark rings under her eyes, and her mouth was very tremulous.

"I have been longing to see you," said John gently. "But I am glad Lady Carnifex has made you rest. Poor little girl!"

She passed her hand over her brow.

"I shall be all right," she answered wearily. "Only I must have a little time to collect myself. I—I am not going to try to thank you, Mr. Ashburton. It would be almost belittling what you have done. But, believe me, I shall never forget it."

John took her hand in both of his and patted it gently.

"There is, thank God, never any question of thanks between friends. As I have been utterly useless for half a century, why not let me do some one the smallest of services before I go my way? It may pass me into heaven, you know."

Leonida looked up at him, and smiled.

"I love to hear you talk," she said. "Sometimes I wonder what I should have done without you and your gaiety to fall back on."

John shrugged his shoulders. "You are the first person who has ever appreciated my flippancy, then!"

"It is one of the most beautiful things in the world, your gaiety," Leonida went on thoughtfully. "It is so tender, so bright, so ready, so understanding. In fact, I—I think I call it heroism."

"My dear child, these ideals of yours have always worried me, if you remember."

"And now I must tell you why I wanted to see you." She drew the fringe of her shawl slowly through her fingers. "You are all going back to England to-morrow."

John was silent.

"The Carnifexes were going at any rate on the 29th, and they want you to travel with them. And—and Naler's ankle seems better. I have written to the English pension here, to engage a room for myself. It is kept by the

widow of a clergyman, and is a shelter for many lone females—so—so——"

"So nothing, Leonida. You must come away from this place. You can't be left here alone!"

"But I would really rather stay. I have promised Lady Carnifex that, if no opening occurs to me before spring, I will go home and pay her a long visit at Carley then. And if I need any help at any time, I shall send her word. Indeed, I shall."

John sighed. "Well, my dear child, I have thought it all over, and if you insist upon staying the winter out here, stay you must. But I may as well break the news to you that Tom and I are going to constitute ourselves your guardians. Once a month, one of us will come here to see how you are getting on and to arrange all your business matters for you. You will simply have to grin and bear it."

A great lump came into Leonida's throat. She tried to speak, but the words would not come.

"Of course," went on John, smiling, "you

understand, there is safety in numbers. Singly, either Tom or I would be questionable. Combined, we form an invincible trust company. We shall worry about you and fuss over you to our hearts' content; and our eyes will never be off you, remember that! My only fun in going home will be the prospect, in a month's time, of sending you a Christmas box. I shall begin to pack it at once. I shall buy Rostand and violet water and handkerchiefs and cakes with pink icing, and everything else I can think of. What sport it will be!"

"I would rather have a good talk with you than any Christmas box," said Leonida, trying to laugh. "And I do love Rostand and violet water!"

They all parted from her that night, as their train was to leave very early. John made every possible arrangement for her comfort and security, and threatened to come back to see her in two weeks' time. Just before he left her, she showed him a little memorandum

she had found in her grandmother's writing-case.

"Dear Leonida," it ran, "be sure to have my full title put on my tombstone."

"What a remarkable woman she was!" said Leonida, as she folded the bit of paper away. "Her courage and her will taught me so much."

John held her hand in his as if he were very loath to let it go.

"You have plenty of courage and will of your own," he answered. "And plenty of mind to operate them, too. But don't—oh, my dear Leonida, *don't*—be quixotic!"

"Why?" asked Leonida, smiling.

"Because it will lead you into horrible things. Your dresses will always be made of what other people don't want, and consequently ugly. Your servants will always be unfortunate and maimed—and consequently useless. Your conscience will always make the most disagreeable things seem duties—and consequently you will make yourself and every

one else unhappy. It is all those ideals again, you see."

"And what would you have me have, if not ideals?"

John raised the hand he held to his lips. "An ideal!" he said, rather sadly.

One afternoon in January, Leonida sat over the fire in the tiny drawing-room of the English pension at Montreux. It was a bright winter day, and the sun streamed in upon her, giving a tinge of comfort to the bare, shabby room. Photographs of family groups, and antimacassars, of family manufacture, were scattered about. It was altogether dreary, and implied a concentrated essence of economy, as John Ashburton said. But Leonida had passed many peaceful weeks there, losing herself and her thoughts in books, and striving to work out some plan of action for herself.

She looked far older than the Leonida of three months ago, as she sat gazing into the

blazing coals. The expression of her mouth and chin had changed, and that always means development of character.

A book lay in her lap, over which she had been dreaming for an hour. It was the little volume of Welsh legends which John had given her the spring before. She had used it well, for it was worn and scarred, and marked in many places; and among the leaves of the story which they had read aloud at Carley lay a few dried pansies.

She was brought to herself suddenly by the entrance of the little Swiss maid with a card. The visitor was below, she said, and asked to see mademoiselle.

Leonida read it in blank astonishment. "Mr. Rufus Carnifex!"

For a moment a wild fear seized her that something had befallen John, and that they had despatched Rufus to tell her; but on second thoughts, she smiled at her fancy. Rufus, at least, was not quixotic.

"Show him up," she said; and she drew for-

ward another chair to the fireside. There was a mirror on the mantelshelf, but she never even glanced toward it as she waited.

Rufus came toiling laboriously up the stairs. He paused at the door.

"How do you do?" he said. "I think I had better leave my overcoat over these banisters, had I not? You see, there is not much room in the hall down-stairs."

"It is a very good place," answered Leonida, holding out her hand. "How are you, and what brings you to Montreux?"

"I am fairly well, thank you. I had an attack of influenza just before the holidays. The bad effects cling to one some time, I find. But I am almost recovered now. It is good to see you looking so well."

"How is your mother?"

"Every one at home is quite well. They have had large house-parties at Carley all winter, you know. I am living in rooms in town. I find that I can concentrate more there. Yes, every one is quite well."

Leonida took up the poker, and turned over some coals in the fire.

"What do you hear from Geoffry?"

"I believe the news is very good. I never see his letters. He writes such an impossible hand. But from what mother tells me, he seems very well and very happy. The life suits him to perfection. I suppose there is room in the world for every sort of taste."

"Is Geoffry coming home, did you say?"

"No," said Rufus, "Geoffry is not coming home."

There was a pause. Then Leonida roused herself suddenly.

"And now tell me about the book."

"It is progressing splendidly. The first volume is nearly complete, and a Baliol man, a great friend of mine, has read it and criticised it. His opinion of the thing as a whole is excellent, and I am immensely encouraged. He says he believes that ultimately it will be accepted as a work of reference." He turned

toward her. "I knew you would be glad to hear this."

"Yes," said Leonida thoughtfully. "I am very, very glad."

"I have had several typewritten copies made of the completed portions. I shall send you one from London."

"Please do. It will interest me very much."

Again there was a pause.

"I saw Mr. Ashburton in the street the day before I left home."

"Indeed! And did he send me any message?"

"He did not know I was coming," said Rufus slowly. "No one—knew I was coming."

A coal dropped suddenly from the grate, with a hissing sound. Leonida started, and turned.

"I don't understand——"

Rufus rose and leaned against the mantelpiece, resting his chin on one hand and looking down on her.

"I have tried all my life," he began, "not

to dwell on myself or my own feelings too much. I have never had any one at home with whom I could talk sympathetically, at any rate. Looking back on my lot now, so far as it has gone, it seems to me to have been an unusually lonely one. You see, I was ill a great deal as a child, and, apart from all morbidness, greatly misunderstood as a boy. Geoffry was always so much stronger, so much more of a favorite than I. Yet I have really accomplished a good deal more than he."

He raised his hand and straightened an ornament on the chimney-piece.

"I once heard you say, Leonida, that you measured a man's worth by what he accomplished."

"Yes," said Leonida hoarsely.

Rufus covered his eyes with his hand for a moment. "Well, such work as I have done, such a man as I am, I want to put before you. I want you to know just where my strength and my weakness lie. I wish I had more to

offer you, Leonida. For I want to ask you to be my wife."

Leonida turned away and looked thoughtfully out of the window. The cries of some children, playing in the street below, broke sharply on the stillness. The sun had faded a little, and was shifting its patterns on the floor.

She was silent for so long that Rufus began to drum, nervously, with his fingers on the mantelpiece. Finally she spoke.

"Do you love me?" she asked slowly.

His face changed.

"Yes, Leonida. I love you so much that you have influenced the trend of my whole life. My work has been the principal thing in the world to me, in the past. Now, I find myself wondering, as I write, what you will think of it all and how it will appeal to you. Whatever I accomplish, you are responsible for. I only wish I had more to give you."

Leonida looked at him fixedly. "It is rather I who should try to be worthy of the gift.

When I see how useless I have been these past weeks—when I see how much I need in the way of development and education—and then think that I have had any part in the great task you are accomplishing, I am ashamed of my own unworthiness. I do not mean to say that I am in sympathy with all your religious ideas; I don't even understand many of your practical ones. But you are putting the best of your manhood into a noble effort, and if I could do the least thing to help you——"

"Then, Leonida—you—will marry me?"

"Yes," answered Leonida quietly, "I will marry you."

She held out her hand, and he raised it to his lips. Then she rose and stood beside him. Her eyes were on the shabby little volume she held; she lifted them suddenly to his face.

"Do you believe that—that sympathy and tenderness and understanding are as good as love?" she asked impulsively.

"They *are* love, Leonida," he answered gravely.

BOOK THREE

STORM AND STRESS

I

THE FIRST REACTION

BOOK THREE

I

THE FIRST REACTION

"THE question is," observed Lady Carnifex thoughtfully, "are they happy?"

She was sitting on the terrace at Monte Carlo, talking to John Ashburton. It was a brilliant March morning, just two years after Leonida's marriage to Rufus Carnifex. The sun blazed down on the sea with the fierceness of a more Northern June, the air was laden with the scent of orange blossoms. Lady Carnifex sat on one of the marble benches, her pink cloth dress arranged in folds with immaculate care, and she glanced from time to time at the gay throng passing by. A band was playing in the distance, and the very atmosphere seemed laden with life and brilliancy.

"My dear lady," said John pleasantly, "you forget that they have had two years in which to get over their disappointment. All young married people have to be disillusionised. They are probably now settling down into calm domesticity."

He did not speak with much conviction, somehow. He had aged, John Ashburton. His hair was more white than black now, and his face more heavily lined.

Lady Carnifex sighed. "It isn't Rufus who worries me, it's Leonida. If I were she, I would have been bored to distraction long ago. Sitting with folded hands in an obscure German village for two solid years—twenty-four solid months—let me see, how many weeks?"

"Oh, *don't!*" implored John. "It's quite bad enough without that."

"I never could multiply, anyway. Why, she didn't even have a chance to wear her trousseau things, Mr. Ashburton. And I really don't see that this 'complete isolation from outside annoyances.' as he says in his letters, has

helped Rufus's book much. It isn't finished, and goodness only knows when it will be published. I think books are to be read, don't you?"

"Except when one is too young or too old," said John cautiously.

"Then all that illness he had last winter, and the burden of nursing him, and everything! If she had only let me come and help her take care of him, but she wouldn't. I should hate to be a nurse, though. Do you know, they wear rubber heels on their shoes—it makes their feet look fearfully ugly. Well, I'm sure I hope they'll like the house I have taken for them in Sloane Street. For a town house it's really pretty. I had the drawing-room done in pale green—such a good background for Leonida, don't you think? Tell me, when you saw them in the autumn, how did she seem?"

John poked the ground meditatively with his walking-stick.

"Leonida seemed very much as usual," he said slowly. "You see, I wasn't there long. I

simply stopped on my way home from Homburg. Rufus was eternally busy, and she read and walked, and sat by herself a good deal."

There was silence for a moment. Then Lady Carnifex sighed.

"I do wish I could understand how a woman with Leonida's taste could marry a man with Rufus's nose. Rufus looks exactly like his father, anyway."

John smiled. "Consistency is the strength of man as much as inconsistency is the charm of woman. Consistently, Rufus has his father's nose; inconsistently, Leonida persuaded herself to marry him."

"Then you believe she simply persuaded herself that she wanted to marry him?"

"Not exactly." John wrinkled his brow. "I think Leonida's character is too complex to be judged in that way. She is a mass of sensations, and very delicately and finely made. What was wanting in her at the time Rufus wished to marry her was a—a motor power. She felt she was useless—without ties and

without responsibility. So she wrote out the word Duty with a capital *D*, hyphened Rufus's name on to it, and married him."

"I'm sure *I* wouldn't have married Rufus for anything abstract like that, even if he is my own son. It would have taken more money or position than he will ever have, or something of that sort, to make me willing to look at him for the rest of my days; but I don't know that even a house on the corner of Grosvenor Square and Brook Street would have made me listen to him."

John evidently wanted to change the subject.

"We must give her some good times this season in London," he said. "If the house is attractive she ought to entertain a little, Lady Carnifex. You will have to manage that."

"Yes, I am coming up from Carley after Whitsunday; and if Rufus makes a fuss, I shall box his ears. I shall take her to my dressmaker, and make her give a series of evenings, or dinners, or something. I wish they had a child Mr. Ashburton."

"So do I. It would do much for them both. As I have often told you, I think Leonida's character is still very dormant—one side of her has never yet lived."

"Perhaps it never will live!" said Lady Carnifex, yawning.

"Oh, yes, it will; it is bound to. And I think it is the keynote of the situation between them. I should say that the question is, not whether they are happy, but what is going to form Leonida's happiness in the future. Look at that woman in blue, who is she? She seems vaguely familiar. Lady Ludovic Widmore, by Jove!"

Lady Carnifex ruffled her small person suddenly into a whirlwind of excitement.

"And that is *the* man! What an affair it has been! Do you suppose she will get her divorce from her husband?"

"I fancy she will. It is the inevitable outcome that she should marry this chap, I suppose. She has been an unhappy woman for years. You see, she found out after she was

married that she had made a mistake. I am sorry—I have always liked her."

"But surely you wouldn't want her to go on spatting with Lord Ludovic forever!" said Lady Carnifex briskly. They say he throws things at her. And it is simply ruining her complexion. Here this man has been in love with her for years, and she with him. We've only one life to live after all, and I'm sure all the nicest people get divorced nowadays."

"I should have liked her better if she had stuck it out," said John quietly.

"Oh, I agree with you that marriage is solemn and binding, and all that! But it's sometimes terribly dreary, and it does seem to me rather a pity, you know, that people should have only one chance at it."

"Like a sort of progressive euchre party!"

"Not at all," said Lady Carnifex huffily. "I'm sure I believe in ideals myself, Mr. Ashburton. They always give people such a sweet expression about the mouth."

"And that is about all they *do* do," answered

John smiling. "No, I don't think idealism helps. I think the whole secret may be summed up in one word—companionship. Of course young people start out with vistas of eternal orange blossoms; the beginning is very apt to be hilarious. The danger comes when the gilt has worn off, and she forgets that he likes bacon for breakfast, and he forgets that she can't stand the smell of a pipe. If, at this period of first misunderstanding, they would only take their good times together, and enjoy the same things, many coming storms would blow themselves out. As it is, a sort of stagnancy takes the place of enthusiasm, and the most fatal danger of the matrimonial sea befalls them; they begin to drift. After that it is short work. She finds that her soul has found its true mate in the first good-looking man who comes along; and he persuades himself that some woman who reads Ibsen understands him better than she. Act next: the divorce court. Act next: further disillusionisement. Act next: repetition of the whole

business. Act last: well, let us say, purgatory. Personally, I should rather go to purgatory than either heaven or hell. Extremes are too violent for my old age."

"I don't know," said Lady Carnifex. "It has always seemed to me that hell would be rather smart, and heaven rather ordinary, but that purgatory would be fearfully middle class. Divorce is awful, though. It would be splendid if some nice, good-looking, unmarried bishop were to start a crusade against it, wouldn't it?"

"One of the great factors to uproot divorce would be to make it unfashionable. Therefore I am particularly sorry that such a woman as Lady Ludovic Widmore should succumb."

Lady Carnifex raised her sunshade and tilted it at a becoming angle. "But, after all," she said regretfully, "it seems unjust. We change our religion and our friends and our cooks, and even the color of our hair; but we aren't allowed to change our husbands. It's just as if we ordered a frock, and when it came

home from the dressmaker's found it didn't fit. I think it's rather hard we should have to wear it forever, and know that it was all wrong."

They were silent for a moment; then John said: "So Geoffry comes home this spring?"

"Thank goodness, yes. He expects to join us in town in May. You can't fancy how glad I am; it's nearly three years since he went, and I've almost forgotten if he parts his hair or not. Dear Geoffry! Of course he'll fall in love with some girl this season, and marry. But I don't care. I'd rather have him marry a—a girl who did work in Berlin wool than go all the way out to Texas again."

"Be careful—you'd have to present her at court! And people who work in Berlin wool generally wear it all over them."

"Yes, I know. Like living in a villa, or doing acrostics in the Queen, isn't it? But he won't go out to Texas again if I can stop it. We'll amuse him too well for that. What are you going to do for the summer, Mr. Ashburton?"

John laughed. "I never plan ahead. I think

a person who knows his own plans is like a person who always knows ages and addresses and dates. But, as far as I can tell, I shall be in town for the season, and occupy Tom's house at Carley Weir until late in the autumn. You know his labors will keep him in Vienna for some months to come."

"What wonderful things he has done, hasn't he? It must be fearfully messy work, though. Well, if you are in Devon, you can keep an eye on Rufus and Leonida. Sir Rufus and I are coming abroad again in July, and they are going to run Carley House till we get back."

"And Geoffry?"

"Oh, I don't know what Geoffry will take it into his head to do. He may come with his father and me—he may stay at Carley and loaf. It depends."

"On the lady who works in Berlin wool?"

"Yes," Lady Carnifex rose and gathered up her dress. "It will be very nice, though, if he falls in love with some one who works with embroidery silks," she added pensively.

"Again, it depends," said John, as he followed her.

The young Rufus Carnifexes arrived in England the end of April, and settled at once in their house in Sloane Street. During the first busy days which followed, Leonida did not have much time to think. Rufus's books were to be unpacked, his study to be arranged, his doctors seen, and various comforts to be established for him. He had had a severe attack of pneumonia the winter before, which had left him with a chronic cough, sleepless nights, and a violent dread of the fresh air. He was obliged to rest two hours every afternoon, and it was then that Leonida relaxed and caught up with herself.

She stood in her drawing-room one afternoon, during her period of freedom, and looked wonderingly about her. Lady Carnifex had given a little French touch to the room, with its pale green silk draperies and paneled walls. A white marble chimneypiece sup-

ported a delicate Empire glass; one or two charming little pastels stood about; and the window was banked high with pink azaleas.

Leonida opened one of the leaded sashes, and looked out. The gaiety of a May afternoon was over London. Carriages swung by, peddlers of sweet lavender called in the streets, the dresses that passed were bright colored and spring-like, and the sunshine streamed over all. But she seemed strangely alone, somehow. It was hard to believe that she was not yet twenty-three; there was an almost unnatural gravity about her. To-day, she found herself weary and discordant with all the movement and life about her; and she felt a sudden relief when a servant interrupted her to say that John Ashburton was down-stairs.

They had met once or twice before since her return, but always in the presence of other people; and she now understood that he had come to really talk to her. She held out her hand gladly.

"I am, as usual, a grass widow!" she said.

John deposited his hat carefully on a chair.

"So I have observed at this time of the day. That is why I came now. I always like wives and husbands separately, never together."

Leonida returned to her post at the window, and beat a little tune with her fingers on the pane.

"I am not sure that I like them, even separately," she remarked.

"Well, I'm glad I am unmarried, my dear lady. Turn around here, I want to ask you a lot of questions. You answer more with your eyes than your lips, you know."

"I am ready to answer anything, any way," Leonida said, with an attempt at gaiety, as she sat beside him on the sofa. "Do you want to know if Rufus and I quarrel, or if my hair is all my own?"

"I want to know everything."

"Let me see! Germany for two years is rather monotonous, or a very general definition will do. Rufus, as you know, has not been at all well, and very busy. There were a few de-

cent people, not many. I am awfully glad to live at home again, and I think the house charming. Proceed!"

"What has Rufus really accomplished?"

"A great deal of very difficult work. He dictates to me every morning, you see. So I know."

"Are you in sympathy with it all?"

She shook her head. "No, I feel for him, not with him. Lady Carnifex is fearfully disappointed that the book is not to be published yet. She says she expected to see her name on every railway bookstall in England."

They were silent for a moment. Then John began to stroke his chin thoughtfully with his hand.

"Leonida," he said solemnly, "I will tell you what is the matter with you: you are bored!"

Leonida laughed, yet her laugh was forced. "My dear Mr. Ashburton, I have just ordered six new frocks, sent out invitations for three dinners, and arranged to be presented on the

17th. What is your idea of earthly bliss, may one ask?"

"No," John repeated gloomily — "you're bored, dreadfully bored, frightfully bored. You've been bored for two years. Personally, I've been bored for twenty. So it doesn't much matter. If you keep on at this rate, you will be cynical by Christmas. Did you know that Geoffry had reached London this morning?"

Leonida rose suddenly to her feet. "Geoffry!"

"Yes, he came unexpectedly. His ship was not due until to-morrow, you know. I thought Lady Carnifex would have sent you word. I have just been lunching with them in Cadogan Square, and Geoffry said he was coming to see you and Rufus this evening."

"I am very glad," said Leonida slowly.

John flecked a morsel of dust from his sleeve. "He looks very well!" he remarked. "He has grown more ripe, I think. Does not strike one as so healthy minded, you know. The only word that will define Geoffry is matutinal.

There is a hunting song about the dawn, and the horn, and the dew, and fair Phyllis, and all that sort of thing, which always reminds me of him."

Leonida shook up the sofa cushion behind her.

"I have not seen him since I was married, you see," she observed. "I shall have to get to know him. Think of his coming back to England to find a ready-made sister-in-law!"

"He will probably enjoy going about with you and Lady Carnifex immensely. He is always run after in London; he is one of the most popular men I know. Almost too popular. What Geoffry wants to develop him is a good big woe—something which really hurts. He will get it some day."

"We all get our pains, sooner or later," said Leonida unoriginally.

"To go back to yourself," John went on—"another thing that strikes me is that you have made your *agréments* with life. You have not so many little tin gods as you used to have.

It is a very healthy change, if it has taken place."

Leonida smiled. "To a certain degree, it has. But then the little tin gods have been replaced by big stone idols. I hope never to live long enough to outlive my enthusiasms, Mr. Ashburton."

"Then your tombstone will read: 'How sad that she should die so young!' Personally, I want to die just as soon as I become unattractive. It is better to be dead than boresome," said John flippantly.

"Do you remember once saying to me that life was largely a question of elimination?" asked Leonida thoughtfully. "There is one of your commandments to which I will subscribe. I have learned to cast aside so many things as useless—for instance, so many of my old perplexities and doubts. One must just live as best one can, and not go searching for trouble, I believe. So you have converted me on that point. Then, again, one of the strongest tenets of my life now is in the value of friendship.

And you, the skeptic, are responsible for it."

"Do not call me a skeptic, Leonida! My whole life has been one long effort to delude myself into believing in things. I might be called a martyr optimist. But what a mockery it is! I have striven to be great, and I have only succeeded in being agreeable. London seasons have made my life-struggle commonplace; and, to crown all, my epitaph will probably be: 'He moved in the best society!' "

"I wish I could stay here and talk with you all afternoon!" Leonida said, as she rose, with a little sigh. "You are the most amusing person in the world, and the very pleasantest. But the clock has struck four, and Rufus will be awake. I must go up to him. He is particularly wretched to-day, and can not leave his room."

John took her hand in his. "Do not make yourself cheap to Rufus," he said. "It is a great mistake to imagine that one has a right to lose one's individuality. You are very

young, my dear; and, I am old enough to tell you, you are very handsome."

Leonida paused before the mantel and looked critically in the glass. She raised her hand and put back a little wisp of hair behind her ear. Perhaps it was as well that she did not see that the smile in John's eyes had reached his mouth.

"What color," she remarked, "should you say was most becoming to me?"

"Good heavens, give me time, Leonida!" said John piteously. "Whom have you designs on now? and which of your frocks fits best?"

She leaned her elbows on the chimneypiece, still looking absently at her reflection in the glass. "Do you remember that first summer at Carley Weir, before mother died? Well, I used to wear white almost always then."

Something suddenly flashed out in John Ashburton's memory. He took up his hat and stick, and drew on his gloves.

"If I were you," he said carelessly, "I should stick to white, if it pleased me. But I always

like a touch of color myself. Why don't you wear a little blue velvet ribbon around your throat, as you used to? Good-by, dear child. Remember me to Rufus, and look out for yourself. I shall come again in a day or two."

"I have never before demeaned myself by minding other people's business," he thought grimly, as he walked down-stairs; "and I'm an awful fool to begin now!"

Leonida stood idly for some moments after he had gone. Then she rang for her maid, and sent her out to Regent Street to buy a piece of blue velvet ribbon.

Somehow it was just like Rufus that, on this evening of Geoffry's home-coming, he should get up a sick headache, and revel in its tortures; keeping the house mournfully silent, and Leonida at his bedside with cologne water and a fan. She left him only long enough to eat her lonely dinner, and then went back to her post, patiently and quietly. The window was open, and, as she fanned him, she could

hear the roar of the city and feel the cool night breeze on her cheeks. The room was dark, and she could not see distinctly, but she realised at last that Rufus was sleeping. With a sigh of relief she dropped her aching wrist in her lap. Her lips suddenly began to quiver rebelliously. The servant at the door would tell any one who came of Rufus's indisposition; and she had so wanted to see Geoffry! She had always liked him.

A soft knock at the door brought her to her feet with a start. The blood seemed to rush to her face, and then roll away again, and her hands shook. She looked at Rufus almost in terror, but he did not stir. Very gently, she slipped out of the room. Mr. Geoffry Carnifex was down-stairs, the footman said, and had insisted on seeing her.

Leonida gave an angry little laugh as she caught herself glancing at her own image in a glass on the stairs. She straightened her shoulders spasmodically, with the action she had inherited from her mother, and held her

head high as she drew aside the drawing-room curtains.

He was standing in the middle of the room, laughing, with the lamplight on his head—laughing the same old laugh, and holding out his hands to her.

"Why, Leonida, my dear little sister, did you think a mere headache of Rufus's would prevent me from seeing you? How are you? Are you prepared to adopt another new relation? Poor old Rufus! I'm awfully sorry he has had such tough luck."

She could not speak, somehow. She stood silent, smiling at him, and letting him keep her hands in his; and silence fell upon Geoffry in his turn, and he could only smile back at her. Something in her eyes seemed to have suddenly reflected itself in his.

"How silly we are!" said Leonida at last. "I'm really *frightfully* glad to see you, Geoffry. You've got to be very good to me; and if you don't like me for a sister, just be polite and don't say so."

Geoffry looked her over wonderingly. "You're changed, Leonida!" he said, laughing again. "You're very much married, I suppose."

"Oh, no, I'm not!" she answered coolly. "Do you forget that I have been locked up in Germany for two years? One does not keep sentimental in Germany, somehow. Their cooking smells so!"

"John Ashburton says you're a disciple of his; and father says you're a brick; and mother says you're the handsomest young married woman in town. I agree with her. I always did like you in white. And, by Jove, Leonida, you still wear the little blue ribbon around your neck, don't you? You don't know how often I've thought of that little piece of ribbon."

Leonida glanced at him warily. Then she raised her hand to her throat. "Why, yes, of course," she said carelessly. "I remember. I used to wear it when I first knew you all at Carley Weir. I remember perfectly."

There was silence.

"Well, I'm awfully glad to be home again," Geoffry went on briskly. "I simply starved in Texas, I can tell you, though I did love the life. You'd like it, too—it's all so pure and simple and healthy. How well mother looks, doesn't she? And she's so excited about taking you around. I'm going to court with you on Friday. Behold the return of the Western lion!"

"I do hope they'll make a fuss over you! I should love to be related to a great man. Can't you invent some stories about bear hunts or Indian massacres?"

"My dear Leonida," said Geoffry reprovingly, "you'll some day hear your husband spoken of as a great author. How can you wish for other advertisement? Dear old Rufus! Is he just the same?"

"No, I think Rufus has changed." Leonida's voice dropped instinctively. "He is older and wiser, and he has suffered a good deal physically. If he did not insist upon working so

hard, things would be easier for him. He ought to have led the life you've been leading. Are you going back to Texas, Geoffry?"

Geoffry smiled. "I don't know," he replied. "I'm not sure."

Leonida put up her hand to screen the lamplight from her eyes. "Ah, a lady, I suppose! You'll have to tell me all your love affairs. Brothers- and sisters-in-law always do that in novels."

"But this doesn't happen to be a novel, you see."

"Mr. Ashburton says that life is always either a tragic farce or a comic tragedy. I hope my fate will be the latter. One would not mind ending up in blood, if one could be funny by the way."

"You *are* changed," said Geoffry slowly. "You are not the old Leonida. Mr. Ashburton was right."

Leonida laughed. "So he said I was changed?"

"He said you now had something to conceal."

"I think secrets are very interesting, especially when every one is trying to guess them. Did he say what mine was?"

"No," said Geoffry, shaking his head. "But I mean to find out."

"But suppose—suppose I am not quite sure of my secret myself?"

"Then I shall teach it to you."

"You are very egotistical!"

"And so are you," said Geoffry promptly. "It is very good indeed of me to waste time over your secrets, please understand."

Leonida looked at the toe of her slipper critically; then she laughed.

"All the same, my dear sir, you know you are very curious to find mine out!"

"Don't let's fight, it's too warm," said Geoffry lazily. "And I'm too overcome with joy to be sufficiently disagreeable. I have brought two of the most ripping dogs home with me—

they're bull terriers. I am going to show them in the autumn; and every morning now I shall take them to walk in the park, accompanied by my sister-in-law. Mother says so! I shall begin to-morrow, and will call for you at eleven."

"I am always busy in the morning."

"At what?"

"I work with Rufus."

"Haven't you yet learned that a man respects his wife only as long as she keeps herself for his play hours?"

"So far I have made a success of marriage because I have not had to unlearn anything."

"Bosh!" returned Geoffry pleasantly. "You'll please be ready at eleven. I shall run up and see Rufus then, if he can't be disturbed to-night. I've got to go back to mother now. I promised to. Don't you think you might tell me your secret before I go?"

"My dear Geoffry, my sole secret is that I am changing cooks to-morrow, and I don't want any one to find it out."

When he had said good night, Geoffry lingered in the hall for a moment.

"Tell me—that little piece of blue ribbon—have you worn it ever since you were married?" he asked.

"Yes," said Leonida faintly.

II

GEOFFRY'S HOME-COMING

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It is a truism so stretched that it has almost become warped that, whereas a man always wants to shine, a woman is often willing to reflect. Like all platitudes, however, this one loses its effect in the search-light of circumstances, and sometimes becomes a paradox.

Leonida had never for a moment been in love with Rufus Carnifex; which showed that she understood him. Far more important, she had never tried to convince herself that she was in love with him; which showed that she understood herself. Her young life had been so full of emotional crises that she had come to look upon the things that produce emotion as essential to living. She could not perhaps have worked for twenty years to secure an end; but she could very easily have sacrificed her

life in twenty seconds to save that of another person.

When her grandmother had died, she had waited, with the beautiful superstition of her Italian blood, for a task to come to her. God sometimes disguises our crosses so unsuccessfully that he makes them look like duties. With all the ardor and the ill judgment of her romantic, untutored nature, Leonida determined to marry Rufus Carnifex. She had ended up feeling that her mission was to read aloud to him. But she had started out convinced that she would find the elixir of life; and this is a reaction which rebounds heavily. Throughout the two years of prosaic drudgery to which she had schooled herself, she had never forgotten that once, far away in her soul, there had fallen the seed of longing to find that elixir. And she knew who had sown it. Amid the daily resolutions which she had made to reflect contentedly the somewhat doubtful glory of the Retrogression of Modern Christianity, she still remembered that she had once

felt how wonderful it would be to light the individual light of her own life.

She had not yet got far enough upon the road to know that, when a woman loves, she goes, with unerring instinct, back to being a reflector after all.

Lady Carnifex went to Rufus, and put her small foot down with vigor. He was to have a trained nurse and a secretary, and Leonida was to come and go as she pleased. The girl was twenty-three, and what was the use of her being so good looking if no one ever saw her?

"I wish your mother would not insist so," Leonida said to him, as he was taking his breakfast in the morning room, some two weeks after Geoffry's arrival. "She is very kind, but I really do not care to do all these balls and dinners and things. Being presented was quite enough."

Rufus looked up from his letters with an air of preoccupied boredom. "I beg your par-

don? Ah, yes. Well, why not go to the Duchess of Wheatland's if it amuses you? Personally, I find her a peculiarly stupid woman. But this secretary is most competent, Leonida, really most competent. He takes my dictation excellently."

Leonida winced. Yet she did not know why she should mind. "I hope more excellently than I!"

"Well, of course he is experienced. One would naturally expect that. Very experienced. He quite suits me. If you are going out to-day, will you kindly bring me in some pens, by the way? I will have one sent to your room, and please match it exactly. It is most necessary that it should be the same length and number."

A sudden impulse overcame Leonida. "I am going to the park with Geoffry and the dogs again this morning," she said.

"Really? Then you can stop in Knightsbridge on your way home, can you not? It is incomprehensible to me how Geoffry can find

so much recreation in those dogs. And the duchess's to-night, I suppose? I hope to see you at luncheon, though. I shall send Masters to tell you whether I feel able to go down or not."

She leaned over him and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Would you rather have me stay at home with you to-night, Rufus?"

Rufus laid down the letter, which he had again taken up. "Thank you very much, Leonida, but Masters is quite competent, and for some reasons I really prefer to dictate to him, good as you have been about helping me."

The Duchess of Wheatland's ball that night was one of the events of the season. Every one who was any one was there, and every one who was no one pretended that they had been asked, and had developed a cold in the head at the last moment.

Leonida had appeared several times with her mother-in-law before, yet never had she looked lovelier than this night. Her face was never

animated, but a faint color tinged her cheeks, and her carriage and her air caught the glance of every one in the room.

"Really, she is the best-looking girl in London," Lady Carnifex observed to John Ashburton, as they settled themselves for a moment's chat. "And you've made most of her success, Mr. Ashburton—going everywhere with her, and presenting only the amusing men to her."

"Beau Brummel!" said John, smiling. "When my income gives out, I shall do this sort of thing on principle. But Leonida *is* lovely. That string of pearls you gave her is most becoming. She is the kind of woman who should wear jewels, and never jewelry. How does Geoffry get on with her as a sister-in-law?"

"Oh, I don't know, I'm sure. They go to the park together every morning to exercise the dogs. Personally, I think the dogs are too thin. I told Geoffry so; and he laughed and said that exercise often made people fat. So

I've persuaded Rufus to buy me an automobile."

"I think automobiles are in the same class as all other imitations," said John. "They aren't quite horses, and they aren't quite flying-machines."

"But they are automobiles."

"Yes, I know. And so are colored photographs of Venice colored photographs. A great deal of everything but Venice. I myself like genuine articles. I prefer to walk, or to jog comfortably on a beast of burden. I don't like to whiz."

"Every one does," said Lady Carnifex pessimistically.

John began to fan himself with his programme.

"Have you ever thought that one could divide the world into the people who do and the people who don't? It is a perfect class distinction. Try it! For instance, there are the people who do things, and the people who don't. There are the people who do buy sou-

venir spoons, and the people who don't. There are the people who do belong to the W. C. T. U., and the people who don't. It is invariable."

"Do you think," asked Lady Carnifex thoughtfully, "that you would rather do too much than too little?"

"Too much; refinement doesn't count in the big scale of things. I would rather be alive in Liverpool than dead in London. I am no hero."

"I've often thought how nice it would have been to have lived in the time of Nero," Lady Carnifex went on. "If only one could have gotten up gall enough to be eaten by the lions! I think heroism is perfectly lovely. It would never have done for me, though, because my back hair is so short, and it wouldn't have looked a bit nice flying in the arena. And in pictures the Christian maidens always had long hair. Imagine a girl with short, straight wisps and a fringe in the Coliseum."

"Even then they had curling tongs!"

"Yes, but I don't believe they let hair-

dressers go around from cell to cell in the prisons, do you? I once knew a man who spent his whole life trying to decide whether or not the Greeks used dust-pans, by the way."

"I am sure his house was dirty, then."

"Oh, fearfully. He was unbearable. That's what I'm afraid Rufus will fall into."

"Do you mean that he'll think so much about Christianity that he'll become a heathen?" asked John, smiling.

"Yes, exactly. You have such a way of putting things! Now, I wouldn't mind half so much if Rufus became a Catholic. Lots of smart people are Catholics; and they always hang rosaries over their babies' beds, and make them look perfectly sweet. I think Catholicism is an awfully nice religion, anyway. But this sort of middle-class Anglicanism is what I can't stand. It always makes one think of family Sunday luncheons, and cold roast beef, and gray woolen stockings, and wet umbrellas."

John threw back his head and laughed.

"You really ought to write a book, Lady Carnifex!"

"Good heavens, no!" said Lady Carnifex, opening her round blue eyes. "It's such fearfully bad form to do anything of that sort."

"Then you think the people who do least count for most?"

"Yes. Because when they *do* do anything every one is so awfully surprised that it sort of magnifies things. Life is so terribly twisty, isn't it? For instance, look at you. When you say most, you mean least."

"I like being complicated, myself."

"So do I. I'd rather be like the Maze at Hampton Court than anything I know."

"You could never be charming if you were not yourself," said John prettily.

"There goes Geoffry," observed Lady Carnifex, after a moment's pause. "Isn't he good looking, Mr. Ashburton? I do wish, though, that I could think what is the matter with the boy!"

"Why?" asked John, carelessly enough.

"Why—I don't know exactly how to describe it, but when he first came home he seemed so grave; and now it's just the opposite."

John's eyes turned on her for a moment. "Now he laughs too much?"

"Yes, that's it exactly. Do you know the symptoms? I feel almost afraid of him sometimes. Fancy being afraid of one's own children! It would be as bad as being afraid of one's own husband."

John was looking after Geoffry; he changed the subject suddenly.

"I was once afraid of a woman," he said, involuntarily thinking of Madame Montedonico.

"Was she pretty?" demanded Lady Carnifex.

"No."

"Oh, then it doesn't matter. If unattractive women are overbearing, the world says, sour grapes. But if good-looking ones are, the world says, what a strong character she's got! It's all in looks, Mr. Ashburton."

"Carrie, you talk enough to wake the dead!" said Sir Rufus, coming up.

Lady Carnifex looked startled. "How awful it would be to bring all one's sleeping dogs back to life again, wouldn't it? Rufus, my dear, I won't say another word."

Geoffry had been trying to speak to Leonida all evening. Yet when chances offered, he instinctively avoided them, and turned away. He found her at last, quite unexpectedly, in a corner of the conservatory, talking gaily to her partner. The man arose as Geoffry approached.

"This isn't your dance, but you can have it," said Leonida, under her breath. "And I don't want to dance, I'm too tired. Let us sit here and rest."

He sat down beside her, silently, and looked about him. They were screened from the main conservatory by a wall of palms. A little stone fountain stood in front of them, and the splash of the water drowned the sounds of the ballroom.

Leonida opened her great white-feather fan, and moved it slowly to and fro. They were both excited, but being a woman she showed it less.

"You are not exactly conversational!" she remarked.

"No, perhaps not." He turned and looked her over with his frank blue eyes, into which something new had crept of late. "Do you know how beautiful you are, Leonida?" he asked.

She laughed. "My dear Geoffry, I did not ask you to pay me compliments, but to talk. The compliments of—of one's family are always banal."

Geoffry's mouth twitched. He took one long glove from her lap and began drawing it through his big, well-shaped fingers.

"I have a piece of news to tell you," he said. "I am going away."

The drip-drip of the fountain was the only sound which broke the stillness. Somehow, Leonida found her voice.

"Going away? Where? How very sudden and romantic this is! I'm afraid the dogs will get fat then, for I certainly sha'n't have energy to take them out alone."

He did not answer.

Suddenly she laid her hand on his arm. "*Why*—are you going away, Geoffry?" she said, almost in a whisper.

His eyes met hers without flinching.

"Because I have found out that I love some one whom I have no right to love," he said simply.

In that moment Leonida shut her eyes, and prayed with her whole soul for strength. One great agonized cry went up from her hungry life, so young, so fair, and so lonely. She set her teeth and pressed her finger-nails into the palms of her hands. Self-control is surely given of God: for when she spoke her voice was as quiet, as strong, as friendly as ever.

"My dear Geoffry," she said, "I am very glad we have this chance to talk—very glad indeed. It is much better. It has occurred to

me once or twice that it might be necessary, and perhaps it is best that we should clear matters up, once and for always. Now listen to me: You have been working yourself into the romantic idea, since you came home, that you care for me. I won't go into the reasons why it *is* only an idea, because it really isn't worth while. You will see it some day as plainly as I see it now. My dear Geoffry, remember we have been together two short weeks, and that you have had many flames before! By all means go away, if you wish. Personally, I don't give the thing that weight. If I considered it really true, I should be angry, horrified, grieved—many things. But I don't. It will all work out; and some day you will be as—fond—of me as I am of you."

Geoffry dropped his face between his hands. When he raised it, it was gray and drawn.

"It is much better that we should look at it in that way, Leonida," he said. "Yes. Yes, I shall go away."

Leonida tried to speak again, but her lips

could not utter a word. She fanned herself mechanically, striving to choke back the torrent of dry sobs in her throat. It seemed an age before Geoffry rose.

"Would you care to go back to the ballroom?" he said wearily.

"I am quite ready," she answered. "I think we had better go. Your mother did not want to stay late."

Lady Carnifex, indeed, was looking for them. She was standing with Sir Rufus and John Ashburton as they came up; and she hurried them off, saying that it was all hours of the morning.

John and Leonida walked down the stairs a little after the others. She noticed, vaguely, that he never once looked at her. As he held out his hand to bid her good-by, his eyes lit on her fan.

"Look!" he said. "It is broken. What a pity!"

And he opened it and held it against the light, to discover the extent of the damage. It

so happened that the shadow it cast was between Leonida's face and Geoffry Carnifex's eyes, as he came up to say good night.

Leonida found her maid at the front door in Sloane Street. She dismissed the woman at once, saying she preferred to get out of her dress alone, and then began to tiptoe up the stairs. Somewhere in the silent house a clock struck three.

At the drawing-room door, she paused. How white the moonlight lay upon the floor! His face had had just that unearthly pallor when he had turned to her. And there, in the center of the room, where he had stood the first night he came home, and held both her hands—she could still feel the thrill that had gone through her. Leonida, Leonida! How her name sounded when he spoke it!

She moved forward suddenly, and flung herself on her knees by the sofa, burying her head in the cushions. The whole thing seemed so horribly clear to her. The first long summer days at Carley Weir, when she had striven

to understand what he meant to her—the first glimmer of light she had had on the evening when he told her he was going to Texas—and the agony of those months without a word from him—and then his home-coming. If that strange look had not come into his eyes, as he stood there, under the lamp, holding her hands—she could have borne it better. It would almost have been easier if he had gone on being indifferent—being the same charming, blithesome, whole-hearted Geoffry. And now, what had she done to-night?

Her tears came at last. Passionately she told herself that she was glad—glad, after all, in spite of her misery. At least it would end clean, clean and pure as it had always been, without one thought of taint or disloyalty to Rufus. She would conquer Geoffry's love by her own; firmly and surely, she would force it back into the bonds of a happy, healthy friendship. For him, at any cost, there must be as little suffering as possible. For herself, she would always know that each wound she had

dealt her very life had spared him a humiliating temptation. As long as she could master herself, all would go well; as long as she could master herself——

From the hall above she suddenly heard her name called. She wiped away her tears, and hurried to the foot of the stairs. It was Rufus, wondering querulously what had happened to her.

"I have not been able to sleep at all," he said gloomily. "Do hurry, Leonida. What kept you in that drawing-room so long?"

"I felt faint," she answered gently. "I stopped to rest on my way up. I am so sorry you have not slept. Will you let me read to you a little, Rufus? It may rest you. I do not want to sleep myself."

She made him comfortable on his sofa, and then went into her own room and put on a dressing-gown. A book was lying open on the table. She caught it up as she left the room.

"What shall I read?"

Rufus sighed. "I wonder if every one suf-

s from insomnia as much as I? It is the result of extreme mental activity, I fancy. What have you there?"

Leonida turned over the leaves of the book in her hand.

"This is the little Welsh legend that Mr. Ashburton once gave me at Carley—before we were married, you know. Do you remember?"

"Ah, yes, I remember perfectly. Read that, if you will."

Leonida began. In her firm, low voice, she went over the little story; and somehow she felt she had never understood it until to-night.

Before she was half-way through, Rufus was asleep. But she read on to herself, storing up the words in her heart, whispering the sentences over and over, and every now and then a hot tear splashing down on the page before her. Thus the dawn found her.

III

THE TURNING-POINT

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THE TURNING-POINT

THE spring had passed, and the last week of the season was drawing to its close. It was intensely hot. Leonida went to the park every day, and panted for the green fields and the sea. They were to move to Carley the end of June; and at the same time Sir Rufus and Lady Carnifex were to go to the Continent. As for Geoffry, he had been alone in Devon and visiting, from place to place, almost continually since his interview with Leonida, and they had not met at all. Rufus had urged him to pass the summer at Carley, and he had given a non-committal answer. He expected to go back to Texas in the autumn, he said.

One particularly stifling morning John Ashburton called at Sloane Street.

"Put on your hat and come to Kensington

Gardens, Leonida!" he said. "It is enough to parboil one, this. I did not know I had capacity for so much suffering left in me. Ah, Rufus, good morning; and how is the book?"

Rufus shook hands, and motioned John to a chair.

"Please excuse me for not rising, Mr. Ashburton," he responded. "I am so absorbingly busy. No, no; you are not disturbing me. Leonida will be ready in a moment, no doubt. You see, my work has multiplied tenfold in the last month. I confidently expect to place it in the publisher's hands within another week. I am immensely relieved that it is finished."

John fanned himself lazily with his immaculate straw hat.

"May one ask to whom you have dedicated it?"

"Certainly." Rufus turned over some sheets on the table before him. "I will read the dedication to you. It may interest you as a suggestion of the work:

"'To the minds of those immortal men whose genius laid the corner-stone of the faith; whose perseverance encouraged it, amid the horrors and trials of the persecutions of an unknown and unthinking land; whose sympathies were boundless, though surrounded by the belittling influences of a sterile community; whose humanity was all-comprehensive. To them we owe our privilege that to-day we may proudly look back to an unequaled past, and may hope for a divine future. They gave us the heritage of an undying doctrine, and an immutable conviction. Thus it is to them that these pages, the fruit of years of labor and thought, are offered as a tribute to their greatness, by one who asks no greater title than that of scholar of the church.'"

John took several long whiffs of the cigarette he held before he spoke. "Why," he asked quietly, "did you not dedicate it to your wife?"

"My wife—Leonida? Why, you must be jesting, Mr. Ashburton. Leonida really com-

prehends nothing of my subject; and what she does comprehend, I'm afraid bores her more than it interests her."

"The most beautiful dedication I have ever read was in Nansen's Farthest North," observed John. "His wife had never been to the Arctic regions, Rufus. Yet he wrote these words for her: 'To her who christened the ship, and was brave enough to stay behind.'" He rose and laid his hand on Rufus's shoulder. "I think Leonida did a good deal toward christening your ship. And I think it would mean a great deal if, at this time of her life, you dedicated the book to her."

"But I really fail to see the allusion," retorted Rufus, a little crossly.

"The allusion is simply this: She is a very young woman. She has all the sensitiveness of a southern nature. To people of her stamp, the small tendernesses of life count for an immense amount. I think Leonida is sometimes lonely, Rufus. It has, of course, been impossible, with your work and your ill health,

that you should share her pleasures. For this very reason, it would seem important that she should share yours. Make her feel that she has a small part in what is so great to you."

Rufus wiped a pen meditatively; he had a very obstinate mouth, John thought.

"You must realize that it is very far from an impertinence in me to say this to you," he went on. "Leonida has been one of the chief interests of my life, and, since her mother's death, I have claimed a sort of proprietorship in her happiness. I know her better than any one will ever know her again. I have watched her every mood, and felt how she vibrated to life and to impulse. She is a highly strung woman, Rufus. Do not play with fire. I don't mean to say that the fire would ever burn you. But it might go out—and for always. Take my word for it, Leonida is lonely. And I do not think you will ever regret it if you dedicate the book to her."

"And you will have to take *my* word for it, Mr. Ashburton, that it is simply impossible.

Of course I should want to please Leonida in every way, but the historical bearing of my dedication is more important than the gratification of a mere sensitiveness on any one's part. If she really cared for the subject-matter, I should feel very differently about it."

John Ashburton sighed. Part of his success in life, however, had lain in the fact that he knew how to back down gracefully. He had no temper, and he had no false pride; and he always managed to convince people that they had won the day, when it suited his purpose.

"Of course," he said, rising, "I quite understand that you, watching Leonida as closely as you do and thinking for her incessantly, are perhaps a better judge of the situation than I. Ah, here is the lady. Good-by, Rufus, good-by."

There are some moments in our lives when we instinctively understand one another. Words seem superfluous—indeed, they would mar the sympathy of trust and confidence

which rises from our hearts. In retrospect, we may never allude to these moments; yet we see them, sharp and clear, with a strength in their influence which is grounded upon the closest phase of human sympathy: Mutual comprehension. It is perhaps fortunate that such experiences come to us seldom, and almost never twice. They would lose their force by repetition, and much of their influence would seem a mere impulse of sentiment.

John Ashburton and Leonida spoke very little that morning. They sat under one of the old oaks in Kensington Gardens. She, watching the sheep graze, he, looking at the outline of her profile against the sky. The bells rang out their chime every now and then, and the voices of some of the children in the alleyways drifted to them.

Leonida felt so strongly that he saw her truly, that it seemed useless to attempt to talk away the barrier between them. A hard line had come in the corners of her mouth lately. She would not have allowed herself to be un-

happy, a year ago; now, she set her teeth, and showed that she was her mother's child. But to John she was different.

She closed her eyes in the noonday drowsiness. Suppose he should ever allude to it to her? Suppose he should suspect the cause of Geoffry's absence from town? Well, what did it matter! The last weeks had been so hard—so miserably hard; so full of an incessant battle, whose very victory meant the defeat of her young life. Leonida was tired—desperately tired. And the dangerous part of being tired is that one does not care.

"Do you know," said John suddenly, "I have had a piece of bad news this morning!"

Leonida turned to him and the color faded from her cheeks. "News?"

"Yes. The worst possible news to one who is a cynic already. One of my oldest and best friends has disappointed me."

He leaned forward, resting his chin on his hand and looking up into her face.

"Lady Ludovic Widmore," he continued, "has got her divorce."

She poked her parasol into the soft turf, trying to seem at ease and to avoid meeting his glance. But John did not seem to notice her embarrassment.

"Of course," he went on gaily, "I do not expect you to take as much interest in it all as I. But let me talk on, and relieve my tongue. And you need not listen. Thank God, even at my unmentionable age I have not outlived my interest in my own concerns. And this has really cut me up awfully. What little faith I had in woman is melting into a drizzle of tears that I should have been hoodwinked so long. Margaret Widmore is a fine woman—or she used to be. She did not have anything more to face in Ludovic than an impossible temper. And she married him with her eyes wide open, and was well enough content until this fellow Maxwell came along. She concluded he was good looking. They read Browning aloud together. Do not laugh, Leonida! Some other

woman would perhaps have hunted with him or gambled with him; the excuse is always according to taste. So an arrangement, more or less amicable, has been made, by which the divorce court is made to seem less dirty and the gossip less true. Incompatibility of temper they call it, I believe."

Leonida had completed a neat little circle of holes with her parasol point. Suddenly the tears rushed into her eyes.

"Have you ever considered that a woman may be lonely at home?" she asked impulsively.

"Oh, dear me, yes. How very young you are, Leonida! I tell you, it is all a question of excuse. Some people put it in a more plausible light than others. That is all. It is a tragically great step, brought about by ludicrously small causes. For instance, a woman first thinks her husband misunderstands her some day when he says she has on an unbecoming dress—when she is tired anyway, and the cook had given notice. Mountains are very easily patched together out of mole-hills. The

thing these fools will *not* understand is, that once given a mountain, one can never revolve it back to a mole-hill again."

"Do you mean social ostracism? How little you know of the sufficiency of love, Mr. Ashburton!"

John laughed.

"My dear child, love at second hand does not depend on the within but on the without. No matter how many pairs of rose-colored diminishing glasses one buys, one can never quite look through the grime that accumulates in the divorce court."

"You are a slave to social conventionality."

"Certainly I am! I benefit by society's asking me to dinner and to stop with it over Sunday. I wouldn't offend it for the world. It is not that divorce—in our age—lessens other people's respect for one. It is that it lessens one's respect for oneself. Personally, I have preferred—or Providence has preferred for me—a normal single to a hectic double state. I don't like babies. I never know which are girls

and which are boys. But if I did marry, I should regard it as an institution made possible only by its permanency. I could be Methodist, but not a Mormon. I could even sing hymns, but I could not make a fool of myself. The world, generally speaking, Leonida, has rather untrue standards. One's own scale of weights and measures are the only official ones. And neither Margaret Widmore nor any of her kind can ever convince me that to make one's life a sort of ambulatory passion instead of a permanent prose is either sane or comfortable."

"But you do not allow for unhappiness!"

"Unhappiness," said John yawning, "spelled backward, generally means stupidity. The world's a very nice place. Perhaps it can't be always plum-cake, but it can almost always, with a little tact and a good cook, be home-made bread. A woman should read her *ménu* carefully before settling herself at any table."

Leonida laughed wearily. "I think you forget that the woman does all the catering."

"Not at all. She is by nature a creature of discernment and delicacy, who can order whatever she wants, if she'll only go about it in the right way. Given a tactful woman, a man is well content to eat his dinner peaceably."

"Then you put tact as the healer of marriage troubles?"

"Yes. Tact and self-control. In this special case, self-control. Lady Ludovic is too clever a woman to do a stupid thing; her mistakes are all mistakes of ill-judgment, not of foolishness."

"Do you mean that she judged herself wrongly to be in love with Archie Maxwell?"

John looked her straight in the eyes. "I mean that she ill-judged the values of things. She persuaded herself that it was more important that her petty little individual life should go its own way than that she should pluckily stick it out at home. She weighed Archie Maxwell against truth—yes, truth, Leonida—loyalty, courage, self-control—and remembering

what poor Ludovic liked for breakfast. Oh, good heavens! and you ask me to be an optimist, after such a clever woman as Margaret Widmore has failed so lamentably in mental arithmetic!"

Leonida grew very pale.

"*My* scale of weights and measures says," she said, in a low voice, "that she was an unhappy woman who had made a great mistake, and that she had a right to some sunshine."

"Of course, my dear child, you are sympathetic and charitable as usual. No, no, no; *I* will try to look at such women as you, and believe that you do not all bleed sawdust when you are pricked, and that your complexion's your own. Don't tell me I'm cynical! I know I am. Only help me, as usual, to believe in things."

He leaned forward and laid his hand on hers.

"Seriously, Leonida, you *have* made me believe in things. Your mother once warned me against trying to influence you. Often I won-

der if she knows how deeply you have come to influence me. I did not believe—say, three years ago—in stability, in genuine impulses, in constancy, or in faith itself. But you have taught me so much, little lady! you have forced me to be a better man, because I believe in you."

A second later John turned away to look at his watch; he could not have seen the little stream of blood that was running from Leonida's bitten lips.

"Half past twelve!" he said. "We've stayed too long. And we are all going to the play, you know, to-night. Geoffry comes back to town to-day. And you and he and I and Lady Carnifex will fill the box sufficiently to make it very uncomfortable."

Leonida rose and opened her sunshade; and they started on their homeward walk.

"Geoffry is so big, he fills any box by himself!" she remarked carelessly.

"Geoffry is a very amusing fellow. I have quite learned to know him since he came home.

n he knows himself, I fancy. What
bly consistent character he is!"

w do you mean?"

in this way. One would naturally expect him to be easy-going, popular, fine-
ing, not over brilliant, inclined to laziness, and the soul of honor. He is one of those people who go through life always giving out and never absorbing. Now, here he is thirty, and no prospect of his marrying. It struck me as contradictory at first; but I have changed my mind. I think that Geoffry"—John paused a moment to light his cigar—"I think Geoffry practically incapable of a great affection."

"I do not see that that is logical," said Leonida mechanically.

John thought for a moment. "One of the prime necessities of life to him is companionship. His heart is made up of so many pieces, so many friendships, so many enthusiasms, that I do not think it could ever contract to a

single affection. When he marries—for he is one of the primitive people who will marry for love, Leonida—he will genuinely adore his wife, but in a purely domestic, separate, and British manner. The adoration will soon pass, and his married life will become a sort of legitimatised best friendship. I do not mean to say that he would ever be unfaithful. But he has been too popular ever to confine himself to home worship. I don't think he is fickle. But I do think he is changeable."

Leonida changed the subject suddenly.

"What is the play to-night?" she asked.

All through the summer afternoon, she sat by her window, trying to steady her whirling brain. Rufus had gone to Oxford to pass the night, with his secretary, in order to examine some documents at the Bodleian; and she could be alone, thank God, and quiet. An irresistible impulse came over her to follow him—to avoid meeting Geoffry, to wait until

she was calmer, and more sure of herself. She could easily invent an excuse for leaving town, and keeping close by her husband until they moved to Carley the following week. A sort of terror overcame her at the thought of seeing Geoffry now—a sort of horror at what she might say or do. People could talk as they pleased; he and she were young, and they loved each other. How she had fought against it—how she had tried to strangle it! But it had been useless. Every day, every hour, every second, had only convinced her that she had failed—miserably failed. And the moment Geoffry had looked into her eyes he would *know* he had won——

If she had realised the strength of it, she told herself, she would never have seen him again. She would have battled against every circumstance in order to keep her old numbness—to absorb herself in Rufus's ills, and to realise that the love Geoffry bore her was beyond her—above her. Why had God made her feel so much? Why was she so passionate?

It was cruel, cruel, to force her back into an eternal prison, and then let the sunshine—the unattainable sunshine—stream in on her in all its glory.

And now, what was she to do? She must face him, she must live somehow through seeing him during the summer; and when the autumn came he would go away. Leonida clenched her hands. She leaned out of her window into the fading afternoon sunshine. How beautiful the sky was—why should she be blinded to it forever? How vast and fair the world was—why should she die of slow starvation?

With a moan, she turned, and made her way into Rufus's sitting-room. The carefully tidied writing-table, the precisely ranged bookshelves seemed to make her feel giddy and sick. She was too young for this, too young—On the desk lay a slip of paper with her name on it. She picked it up.

"Please copy the notes in volume ii, section 1, of the Rev. Dr. Whitman's Sermons,"

it read, "and oblige me by writing very distinctly.—R. C."

In that moment, a strange calm broke over Leonida Carnifex. Mechanically, she tore the paper into strips, and dropped them to the floor. The bustle of the streets came in through the window; a clock ticked loudly on the chimneypiece. Yet she stood absolutely motionless, with a sharp, strange light in her eyes, looking steadfastly at the patches of the red sunset glow on the wall. Suddenly she spoke; her voice rang through the still room.

"He shall not go away alone!" she said.

"For the first time in my life—or in yours either, I expect," said Lady Carnifex to John Ashburton, "you are silent."

"I am so glad you have noticed it!" retorted John gaily. "I have been waiting for some one of you to ask me what my secret sorrow is. Dear Lady Carnifex, I have the toothache."

They were a silent party, indeed. Leonida sat where the glare of the stage lights would

not shine on her face. Geoffry kept in the back of the box, and scarcely opened his lips. He complained that he was tired. Lady Carnifex had on a new frock, and looked it, but there was no one she knew in the audience.

The evening somehow dragged to an end. As they were putting on their cloaks, Lady Carnifex, for the sake of saying something, fired the mine.

"Leonida," she exclaimed, "pale blue is awfully becoming to you! I wish I could stand it. I'm so glad you've taken to wearing the little blue velvet ribbon around your throat again. I've always loved it. And the first time in simply ages that you put it on was the very day that Geoffry got home from Texas. Do you remember?"

"*What?*" said Geoffry suddenly.

"What a shocking memory for dates you have!" broke in John quickly. "If I'm not careful, I shall find you know when my birthday comes. And if you dear ladies don't hurry, we shall never find your carriage.

Women are so delightfully slow. I shall bid you all good night here. Leonida, you're alone at home, aren't you? or are you going to spend the night with Lady Carnifex?"

"Yes, do come, dear. What a good plan! You are really quite original, Mr. Ashburton."

"I can not come, thank you," answered Leonida tremulously. Something was singing in her ears, and her hands were wet and cold. "I must go home."

"Well, then, you and Geoffry can drop me in Cadogan Square," said Lady Carnifex, as the three piled into the brougham; "then he will drive around to Sloane Street with you, and see you safely into the house. I hate to think of you being there alone. I'm so terribly afraid of burglars. Do let your maid sleep on the sofa in the hall."

Leonida leaned back in a corner of the carriage, and watched the yellow lights flash by the window. Lady Carnifex rattled on absently to Geoffry until they stopped at her door

in Cadogan Square. She turned, and drew the girl to her.

"You won't come in with me for the night, dear?"

For one horrible moment Leonida hesitated. Then she silently shook her head.

She and Geoffry never spoke as they drove around to Sloane Street. He took her key from her on the doorstep.

"I shall come in with you and see that you find your maid all right," he said. "Is she waiting up for you?"

"Yes."

"I also want to get a parcel which mother said she left on your drawing-room table. I promised to take it to her."

"Very well," she answered mechanically.

She led the way up to the drawing-room. The room was lit by a clear summer moon, shining in as it had shone there on her bowed figure the night when she had been so sure she had conquered.

She turned to ask Geoffry if he needed a

light to find the parcel. He had closed the door, and was standing with his back against it looking at her.

"Leonida, I want to ask you something," he said hoarsely.

She could not speak. She sank down helplessly on the sofa. Her hands were shaking so that she locked them together in her lap. Geoffry came forward. There was a keen light in his eyes.

"How long—have you cared?" he asked.

Her voice would not come. When she finally answered, it was in a whisper.

"Always, ever since Carley Weir——"

He broke out passionately.

"Why, in God's name, did you marry Rufus?"

She rose impulsively, and turned to the window. Hardly knowing what she did, she opened it, and let in the hot night air. The action seemed to steady her for a moment.

"You must go, Geoffry," she said faintly.

"I will not go. I will not believe that you

would have me go. Good God, we have only one life to lead! Listen, Leonida, it has all been a cruel mistake from start to finish. Why I didn't realise what you were to me, long ago, I don't know. But I didn't. I came home, I swear, without a thought of wrong in my mind. And now the thing has got beyond us. You deceived yourself—you can't deceive yourself any more. I deceived myself—I can't and won't deceive myself any more. And what does it matter, after all?"

The moonlight from the window struck his face, and she saw how ghastly it was.

"You can't stand this sort of thing much longer, you know. Rufus has never loved you. He doesn't care for anything on earth but his cursed book. He's not like other men. He'd soon forget you and me and everything else in his work. And as for people—what do you and I care for them? We're young, and we can start a new life. I would try to be enough for you; and God knows, Leonida—you'd be enough for me!" He had clenched his fists,

eat furrows were drawn in his forehead. don't believe many men have loved women I have loved you these past weeks. I have oved the smallest things about you, Leonida. I have loved your voice and your look, and the urn of your head— And if you send me away, it will kill me——"

Her breath came in thick, short gasps. She clutched at the long silk curtains to keep herself from falling.

Geoffry drew nearer to her.

"It shall never be said that I forced a woman to give away her life against her will. I want to play fair. I will wait two weeks for you to decide. I will stay here in town, and let you think it out alone at Carley. Then, when two weeks are up, you must answer me. And if you love me a tenth as much as I love you, your answer will be yes."

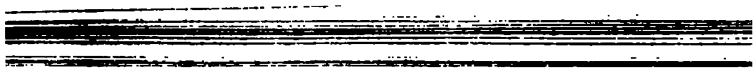
Leonida made a violent effort to control herself.

"But now—you must go, Geoffry," she said again.

There was a breathless pause for a second. Then Geoffry bent suddenly forward and caught her in his arms, crushing her against him, and covering her face with kisses. For a moment she lay there, a mad happiness thrilling through her. Then she broke away.

By some superhuman effort she managed to reach the door.

Geoffry was standing alone in the middle of the drawing-room, when, a few moments later, Leonida's maid came to him. Mrs. Carnifex had sent her to let him out, she said.

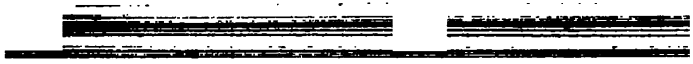


BOOK FOUR

COMPLETION

I

JOHN'S VICTORY



BOOK FOUR

I

JOHN'S VICTORY

THE first day of July, Rufus's book went to the publishers. He had worked himself almost ill to complete it, and when the long mental strain finally broke and relaxation came, he collapsed.

They moved him to Carley with every possible precaution, and the rest and the good Devon air rapidly began to affect him. He could even plan new efforts, and was continually anxious to be read to and amused. Leonida, after the first week, sent his nurse back to town, and threw herself into the work of caring for him with passionate eagerness. It was a relief, after all, to have something to do.

Geoffry, after his mother had left for the Continent, had taken rooms in town. No one

aw very much of him; and he said he had no s. Leonida knew well enough that he was w for her to make a move, and she felt herself totally unable to act. She could bear the routine of every-day duty very well. She could not bear the thought of facing the decision before her.

As each day dawned, she counted it off from the calendar of her life; yet a strange numbness had come over her misery. Something would decide the throw of the dice at the last moment, she told herself; some great event, or some petty little incident. She could only wait until the time came when he should ask her for her final answer, and try to be strong.

When they had been at Carley some ten days, a note came one morning for Leonida, as she and Rufus were sitting in the sunny old garden. A table had been lifted out, and here Rufus kept his books and his medicines, finding healing in the cool sea breezes, which were scented with the full glory of the heather.

They sat there for hours each day, Leonida reading to him until her eyes swam, and the book almost dropped from her aching fingers. Yet she was thankful for the very fatigue.

"Don't you think it is incredible," remarked Rufus, on this particular morning, "the amount of time and effort that people waste on unimportant notes? I believe the art of correspondence has distinctly deteriorated; and I think that what is chiefly responsible is the need we all feel for scribbling pointless messages at every hour of the day. We shall soon entirely degenerate into post-cards."

"Some Frenchman calls post-cards *le triomphe du laconisme*," said Leonida absently, tearing open her letter.

Rufus looked bored. "The French view is always a superficial one," he observed. "Besides which, I don't understand their language. From whom is your letter, Leonida?"

"It is from Mr. Ashburton. He came down from town last night, and is busy settling for the summer, he says. He wants me to go over

to his brother's cottage this afternoon and help him hang curtains."

"Why does he not let his housekeeper hang his curtains?"

"I don't know," responded Leonida wearily. "Perhaps he likes my taste; and anyway, it is rather fun to hang curtains."

She pulled a branch of a climbing brier rose, running riot over the old red brick well behind them, down to her face. The touch of the soft, delicate petals seemed to ease her tired head.

"I have been considering very seriously," Rufus began, after a moment's silence, "what work I shall undertake next. I want to talk the matter over with you."

"Don't you think you might rest for just this summer? You know you are not very strong."

"But I don't think one should ever remain inactive, Leonida. One owes oneself to the world. No, I must continue to write. The question is, what?"

He turned over some books on the table.

"I want to confide to you," he went on, "that in the autumn I intend to enter upon another large—if not larger—field. I mean to write a contemplative study of the lives of the early bishops. My former labor has qualified me for the chronicling of this peculiar era. But, during the summer, I wish to do some light form of literary work. And I think I have almost decided what it is to be."

Leonida freed her branch of roses and roused herself. "Yes?"

"Yes, I have almost decided. My knowledge of the German language is far from superficial, and I think I shall translate into it some of the Welsh legends in your little book there." He pointed to a little volume on the table before him. "You read aloud to me, if you remember, one night when I could not sleep, one especially charming little tale. It greatly impressed me. There are many ways in which you can help me, Leonida. To begin with, I shall ask you often to read the English

version to me, that I may grasp its spirit and style. What do you think of my plan?"

"I find it excellent. I will do all in my power to help you, Rufus."

"I have sometimes thought lately," pursued Rufus, looking at her closely, "that your interest in my work was not as great as it used to be. Of course—" he sighed—"it is perhaps natural that it should seem dry and dull to you."

She winced suddenly, and did not answer.

She drove over to see John that same afternoon. He was standing on the porch of the doctor's cottage, immaculate in his cool white flannels, and measuring curtain-poles with elaborate care.

"Good heavens, Leonida!" he called, as she drove up. "How glad I am to see you! Come and help me instantly. These things are like a bad dream."

She took off her hat, and prepared to work. John brought out piles of snowy muslin cur-

tains, and they sat on the porch steps together, and discussed lengths and breadths.

"This is the most refreshing work I have done for years," said John. "I shall take Tom's house off his hands every summer in future. To think that women have all this fun to go through with, every spring and autumn, and yet complain of housekeeping."

"It is only because you're not used to it that you find it amusing," Leonida answered, smiling a little. "The monotony of curtains and meals soon become unspeakable. I believe my highest qualification of a woman would be a good housekeeper."

"Always provided she did not talk about it."

"But it is so human to talk about one's virtues!"

"Ah, my dear child, virtue explained is very apt to be virtue explained away. You are getting that brass rod abominably crooked; and if you tear anything, you are safer in—in the hands of Lady Carnifex at the dressmaker's, than in Tom's. What is the matter with you,

anyway, Leonida? Have you had a quarrel with Rufus?"

He led the way indoors, to where a step-ladder was standing in a bow window. Leonida took a curtain from him, and climbed to the top of the ladder.

"I am going to do the fitting and tacking," she said. "It is much nicer work; and you can hand me the things I need."

John sighed. "I have been looking forward all day to sitting on that ladder myself! But I want to know about your quarrel with Rufus."

"How like a man! I never said I had had a quarrel with Rufus."

"But when *I* said so, you did not contradict me."

Leonida shook out some tacks in the palm of her hand and counted them gravely. "It is too hot to contradict," she observed. "Anyway, what is the use?"

"Don't be so analytical, my dear Leonida. It is disagreeable. Life, as I have often told

you, is not a question of analysing, but of being agreeable."

They were silent for a moment.

"It is curious," said John pleasantly, "how different mental ages befall one on different days. Yesterday I was eighty-two. To-day I am not more than twenty-eight and six months."

"Doesn't the jump fatigue you?"

"Oh, dear, no. Why, I once skipped from ninety to sixteen in the space of an hour."

"What worked the change?" asked Leonida.

"Truthfully? Well, I had been talking to some one, and some one else interrupted us."

"Who were the two people?"

"You and Rufus!"

She thought for a moment. "But it was I who made you feel old, and Rufus who made you feel young, nevertheless."

John smiled. "Leonida, you are too clever for a woman."

"And you are too clever for a pessimist."

They worked on in silence. John was humming a little tune under his breath. He was in great spirits to-day, Leonida thought.

"Where do you get your courage from?" she asked suddenly.

He laughed. "I have never needed to look for courage. It has not happened that I was attacked by burglars, or wild beasts, or a querulous wife. You see, looking back over my interesting career, it really does strike one how little *has* happened to me. Though I believe at the age of ten I did have the chicken-pox. But I can not be sure. I will write and ask my mother, if you really want to know. However, all this has left me better off than most people, and looking younger than I am. I never tell my age; people who tell their ages are invariably older than they look, and have to lie in consequence."

"You should have married!" said Leonida pensively.

"I have always said that if I could meet the Figaro personified I would marry her. She

would be so charming and so well dressed and so clever, don't you think?"

"It would be the Figaro and the Morning Post, then."

"Don't be snippy, my child. I would rather be the Morning Post than the Times. I would rather be anything, though—even an illustrated paper—than Punch. That would be too cheap."

"It must be a rather noble and thankless career, that of a funny paper."

"Funny papers are very seldom funny, Leonida. And papers that are funny, never mean to be. At least not in England. I'm not a theosophist, but I should become one if I thought there were any chance of my getting a pass, from theosophy, for another existence on another planet. Then I could perhaps be what I have longed all my life to be: A Latin."

"Yes, you are not Anglo-Saxon."

"I am not Anglo-Saxon, yet I suit my time very well. I am an essentially modern person.

My faults are all modern, and so are all my virtues."

Leonida carefully raised herself upright, and fitted a curtain-rod into its socket.

"Did you ever see anything so beautiful?" she asked. "You and I are really very clever. But, tell me, providing theosophy or anything else gave you a life to live over again, would you be glad?"

"I know nothing that would delight me more. The world is a very fair place, after all. We do our best to tarnish it; but even diamonds badly set are beautiful, and tourist hotels can not totally ruin Switzerland. Always remember that, Leonida, whatever life brings to you." He raised his hand and laid it suddenly on hers, as he stood by the step-ladder. "No matter how much is taken away, it does not necessarily mar the beauty of what remains. Do not let your cake be soured because the plums have disappeared from it."

"But without plums it is not cake," she said, a little sadly.

"No, it is not cake. But, as I said to you once before, it is home-made bread. We can not all be sky-rockets; and when one has learned that, one must just go home patiently, and realise that one's drawing-room fire is always there. You know my favorite maxim, that life is full of *agréments*. I don't mean *agréments* in a belittling way; but as good and happy and amusing tasks, which are always waiting to be done, and to be done well."

Leonida descended from her step-ladder. She began to tie back a curtain with a neat little bow of white ribbon. Her head was bent, and John could not see the tears in her eyes.

"I understand!" she answered lightly. "You mean that there are always curtains to be put up!"

"Yes; and there should be a pride in doing it well. My dear child, how beautifully you have done your work, by the way! They look charming, don't they? And I am tired out from simply watching you. Come into the library and have tea."

He put her into an easy chair, tucked some cushions behind her, and poured out her tea.

"Yesterday I almost missed my train in order to stop and buy these cakes with pink icing for you!" he observed gaily. "It is really very good of me always to have them when we have tea together, for they give me a most abominable indigestion."

Leonida went on with her tea in silence. "You *are* too good to me, Mr. Ashburton," she said finally, in a low voice which shook a little. "And what do you ever let me do for you?"

"I am going to ask you to do something for me this very afternoon. My eyes have troubled me a good deal these last few days, and I want to know if you will sit down there at my desk and write a letter for me. It must catch the night mail to town. And by saving my eyes now, you will enable me to finish a most interesting book before morning. Will you?"

"Of course, with the greatest pleasure. But what is such a little thing?"

John laughed. "Do not call it a little thing,

my dear. I may be going to advise my lawyers to change my will, for all you know. Who can tell what mighty causes may spring from one letter!"

When she had finished her tea, Leonida seated herself at the writing-table. She faced the light directly, so that her face was sharply defined. John, on the contrary, sat with his back to the window. He leaned his elbow on the table, and rested his head on his hand.

"I am quite ready," she said. "Begin!"

" 'My dear Geoffry,' " dictated John slowly.

"Geoffry, did you say?"

"Yes, Geoffry."

" 'Leonida is very kindly saving my suffering eyes for me. And I call upon her good nature, as I do not longer wish to delay telling you that I have, as I promised, thought over the talk we had at the club the other night.' "

She hesitated. "Are you sure this isn't private?"

"Oh, not at all. In fact, when you get to the end of the letter, I am sure you will want

to add a postscript to say, on your own account, that you agree with my advice to him. Are you ready? Well, then: 'You told me frankly that nothing bound you to stay in London. Under these circumstances, then, I believe that everything binds you to go back to Texas. We all owe the world some work. If you have nothing to keep you at home, you most certainly ought to go and pursue the path you were following so well, and make something of yourself. You will excuse me if I say that you are nothing very much, now.' "

He paused for a moment in thought, his hand over his eyes.

" 'I can not agree with you that your visit home, however, has accomplished nothing. I think you have learned how eminently fitted you are for ranch life, and how wise your choice of it was. Where you have made such a signal success, it would seem more than foolish to throw that success away. Go back, then, and do the work we all expect of you. And, what is more, go back at once.' "

Leonida stopped for just one second; then she wrote on. Her hand was cool and steady.

" 'To turn to more practical things,' " went on John, " 'I quite understand the dread you have of bidding sentimental good-bys to your people. Partings are quite useless things. They always upset others, and undermine one's respect for one's own resolves. Therefore, if I were you, I should quietly slip away, by the Southampton boat, next week, and write to your mother and all of them from the steamer. Sudden cables are always good excuses. There are apt to be exceptions, however, to every rule; and I should make an exception here. Before you go, run down to Carley and say good-by to Leonida.' "

John broke off. It was beyond his strength to go on while he could see that gray, drawn, set face behind him. If she would only waver, or cry out— But she never faltered. He rose, and began to pace up and down the room.

" 'I—should not tell Rufus it meant a parting, if I were you. Let him simply fancy you down for the day, or something of that sort. But Leonida has been a good friend to you, and I think it would—hurt—her if you were not to bid her good-by. One's in-laws always have abnormal sensibilities, you know. And now, my dear boy, God speed to you; do good work and true work. You are casting your life in noble lines. Believe me, you will never regret it.' "

It was over at last, thank God. He took a long breath.

"There—that is all. Many thanks to you, little lady. Sign it now, if you will—J. A. I am sure you agree with my advice, don't you? Good heavens, what a fool this housekeeper is! There are no envelopes to match this paper. Wait a minute—I will run up and get some from my room. I wish I had married, after all."

Leonida waited until his step sounded on the stairs. Then she snatched up her pen and

wrote one word, over her own name, at the foot of John's letter.

When he came down, he handed her an envelope, and asked her to seal and direct it.

"Don't you want to read the letter over yourself?" she said carelessly.

"No, it doesn't matter. I hope you haven't misspelled any words. You always used to put two *ll*'s in grateful when you wrote to me."

"And to whom was I always so grateful, if you please?"

"Why, to me, of course," said John flippantly. "To whom else, my dear Leonida?"

Leonida met his eyes steadily. "I am always grateful to you," she answered slowly. "I shall be grateful to you until I die."

"Don't talk about death," he returned, as they went out to the porch, and she drew on her driving gloves. "I am sorry the afternoon is over. Look at that pink sunset—how glorious it is! No, decidedly, Leonida, one must not talk about death. Let us rather talk about

life. There will be plenty of time to qualify eternity when one gets there."

The groom drove up with Leonida's little dog-cart; he stood in front of the porch, holding the horse's head, and waiting for his mistress.

John walked down the steps, and stroked the horse carelessly.

"I see you drive Firefly yourself," he called back to Leonida, "be careful with him."

He bent his head, running his hand down the horse's hind leg. Suddenly the groom sprang forward.

"Look out, sir!" he shouted.

A mass of white—one of those very curtains at which John and Leonida had been working—had blown out from the porch, and was whirling across the driveway. The horse, restless and high strung as he was, did not notice it at first. Then, with a quiver of terror, he plunged madly forward.

John heard the groom's warning; a second later he saw the whirling curtain. But that

one second was too late. As Firefly kicked, he bent suddenly to the earth—bent almost double. Then, with a reel, he fell.

By the time Leonida had dropped on her knees beside him, the horse, mad with terror and beyond all control, had broken away.

John was unconscious. Across his forehead there was a curious blue mark. Leonida lifted his head to her lap, and felt his wrist. It was pulseless.

"Good God, Mrs. Carnifex!" panted the groom, as he ran up. "He can't be dead! It was in the forehead Firefly kicked him. But he can't be dead!"

Somehow Leonida found her voice.

"Go and get help!" she said hoarsely. "We must carry him indoors; and then send for the village doctor."

The servants ran out a moment later, and John was tenderly lifted. Leonida went in ahead, and threw some rugs and pillows on the library sofa. There they laid him—to all appearance, lifeless.

The doctor was surprisingly quick. By some happy chance, he had been in the neighborhood. He began by sending every one, save Leonida, out of the room; then he told her that the worst had happened.

"He is not dead," he said. "But I doubt if he ever recovers consciousness. It is concussion of the brain, you see. The hoof struck his forehead first, and then his temple."

Leonida's mind was made up. "Nevertheless, I shall wire to town for two more doctors," she answered, "and also to his brother, who is in Vienna."

The doctor shook his head. "He can not last out the night, Mrs. Carnifex; but do as you please."

Leonida wrote the telegrams and despatched them. On John's desk she caught sight of the letter to Geoffry. She bowed her head in agony for a moment; then she dropped the letter into the post-bag.

The long summer twilight fell. Down the

country lane, the laborers went, on their homeward way. A flock of sheep, with their tinkling bells, passed by. The window by the sofa was open, and the soft breath of the honeysuckle and the brier roses stole in. But there was no sign of life in the still white face.

As the church clock struck seven, Leonida went out into the porch. Could it be possible that such a tragedy had happened here, barely an hour ago, in the midst of all this peace and silence? The stars were beginning to come out, twinkling faintly in the dark blue of the summer sky; and the lights of the village began to glimmer down the road.

The doctor came out to speak to her. He wanted some instruments from his own house, he said. Would she send for them? He thought the hope of Mr. Ashburton's recovering consciousness was perhaps better.

"It is a horrible thing," he kept murmuring, "a horrible thing." Every one in Carley Weir had known and loved John.

Hour after hour dragged on. There were

no lights in the house, save one dim lamp in the library. They were all breathlessly waiting. Leonida, sitting in a corner of the room, never turned her eyes from John's rigid face. The doctor knelt by the sofa, his hand on the motionless pulse. The only sound was the slow, monotonous tick of the clock, and the distant hoot of the night owls over the moor.

About midnight, the doctor felt for his watch. His face relaxed. Leonida stole hurriedly to his side.

"He is coming to," he whispered.

There was a flicker of the eyelids, a tremor of the lips. The doctor told Leonida what to bring him, and she silently obeyed. A second later John opened his eyes.

"Leonida" — he murmured — "my poor child—Leonida—ah! send her out of the room —she mustn't see——"

With a moan, Leonida turned away.

The housekeeper took her place. Together, she and the doctor did all that human hands could. But John Ashburton's race was run.

The doctor came out of the room about half an hour after John had spoken.

"You had better come back," he said shortly. "The—end is very near. He does not mind your being there, now. He is perfectly conscious."

John was surrounded with pillows, with a white cloth over his forehead. As Leonida and the doctor entered the doorway he was speaking to the housekeeper.

"You are quite sure she can not see—anything—painful?" he was saying. "Ah, Leonida, my dear! Come and sit here by me."

She drew up a chair and sat down, catching his hand in hers and holding it against her lips. She could not speak.

"Doctor," John went on—his voice was strong and almost natural—"Doctor, I want to be alone with Mrs. Carnifex, if you please. If you will wait at the door, she will call you —if she wants you."

The doctor closed the door behind him softly. How still the room was! Only the eternal tick

of the clock and the night cries out on the moor. Leonida's breath came thick and short. John raised his free hand and laid it on her bowed head.

"Did—the letter go?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Did you add a postscript—while I was upstairs, Leonida?"

"Yes."

John smiled. "I know what it was," he said.

Again the horrible silence. He stretched out his arm suddenly.

"Put that cushion behind you, dear child. I am sorry I can not reach it for you. Your poor back will be so tired."

A great sob broke from her.

"How am I to live without you?" she moaned. "There is no one, now. God help me, God help me!"

"My dear little girl," said John gently, "perhaps it is good for you that I should go. It will make you depend on your home more. I don't think I've always acted wisely with you.

However"—he gave a little laugh—"I won't begin to croak now. It is rather too late, isn't it?"

He stroked her hair silently for a moment.

"I am so glad, do you know," he went on, "that I am dying with my sight left me. I have always dreaded not being able to see my way clearly. But what a contradiction life is! I started out once thinking I should command the British army—or perhaps the navy, I wasn't particular. And I am dying from a horse's kick!"

Leonida raised her head and looked at him. He smiled at her—and somehow, she never knew quite how, she managed to smile back at him.

"I have left with this good doctor a great many messages for Tom. But I want you to be sure to tell him—that—you and I hung all the curtains ourselves. He will be so surprised! He always says I was such a useless chap——

"And all your life long, Leonida, I want you

never to forget this afternoon. Not the very least little thing that happened—even down to the cakes with the pink icing. Promise me that you won't forget."

His face was growing sharp. She bent nearer. He was panting a little, and his hands were cold.

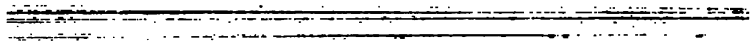
Yet a touch of his old gaiety came over him.

"The first thing I shall say to *le bon Dieu*," he smiled, "is to thank him for letting me know you. God bless you always, little lady. For you have done a lot for me. Some women have irritated me. Some have made me laugh. More have bored me—none have made me unhappy. But you—Leonida—have—made me—credulous——"

And so saying, John Ashburton turned his face to the wall and went his way.

II

LEONIDA'S CROWN



II

LEONIDA'S CROWN

It was almost noon. There was a murmur of drowsing bees in the summer air, and a languor of heavy scents from the garden. High and hot, the sun streamed into the old library of Carley House. It gilded the range after range of yellowed books, it blended with the faded colors of the paneled ceiling, it glowed on the tapestries on the walls.

In the center of the room, a great arm-chair before it, was Rufus's writing-table. It was littered with manuscript and proof-sheets, and volumes of reference were piled high upon it.

The French windows were open, and the songs of the birds in the orchard drifted through them. A honeysuckle vine, which hung its tendrils over the panes, swayed to and fro, sweetening the stray little breezes that moved it.

A tall old clock, standing in a dim corner of the room, ticked the seconds placidly along. There was a certain peace, which belongs only to clocks that have told off many lifetimes, in the swing of its pendulum. As the hands drew near twelve, it seemed to gather its strength together, and gave a little wheeze of fatigue. Then it struck. As the last chime of twelve rang out, Leonida and Geoffry Carnifex entered the room.

Geoffry closed the door carefully behind him. Then he turned to her.

She was standing with her back to the window. She leaned rather heavily with one hand upon Rufus's writing-table, but her head was erect, and her eyes shone. The noon sunshine seemed to lighten about her hair, and Geoffry saw, with a sudden tightening about his heart, that around her neck there was tied a little piece of blue ribbon.

For a moment neither moved to break the silence. Somewhere in the orchard a bird sang suddenly, a few sweet, tremulous notes.

Finally she spoke. Geoffry involuntarily straightened his shoulders as her lips opened.

"You understood, Geoffry," she said.

"Yes, I understood."

"And you will sail on Thursday?"

"Yes."

"Do not—do not come back soon," she said gently.

"I will not come back at all, Leonida. I think it will be easier that way."

There was a pause.

"I pray every moment of my life," she went on, "that you may have plenty of work. It will help you more than anything else. I shall always want to think of you as battling and gaining—never as idle and useless."

Geoffry moved a step nearer her. He leaned upon the table in his turn—with Rufus's proof-sheets under his hand—and looked at her intently.

"Leonida, I am accepting your decision as well as I can. I am trying to bear up under it, and to be a man. I am going to live—though

God knows I don't want to. One little thing I ask you to do for me in return: I ask you to let me kiss you—before I go. Will you, Leonida——?"

She closed her eyes, that he might not see the misery in them. Then she drew herself up to her full height.

"*No*," she said.

Geoffry sank into a chair, and hid his face on his arms on the table. The tears that are tears of blood came into his eyes, and his sobs shook him. Her hands moved suddenly to his bowed head, but she clenched them spasmodically and pressed against her lips. The bird's song sounded again, with almost a cruelty of sweetness.

"It must all end some day," she said wearily; "and then the pain will be passed."

He raised his head.

"What can never end, Leonida, is what you have done for me."

Leonida turned and looked out steadily into the sunshine. "I don't believe you will ever love

any one again as you love me," she answered slowly. "That is why we have been able to do this. Our love has been such a strong, great thing, that we could stoop to no meanness of thought or action. We have loved each other above life itself. I am not perhaps a religious woman, yet I swear to God to-day that I have given you up, not for your own good, but because I love you so much that I love the right more than you. It is a small love that is willing to sin, Geoffry. It is only the greatest love in the world that is willing to renounce."

Geoffry rose to his feet. He passed his hand over his eyes. "I do not understand it."

She sighed. "No," she said sadly, "neither do I. But Mr. Ashburton did."

The clock chimed again, striking the quarter of the hour. Geoffry glanced at it, and his mouth set.

"Rufus will be here in a moment. I must go, Leonida; good-by."

He did not move forward, he did not hold

hand. He only looked at her steadfa ith all his manly, honest soul in his eyes.

Leonida grew paler. Several times she tried to speak, but her voice would not come.

"Geoffry," she said at last, "when you go out of this room to-day, you will take my life with you. All the love of it, all the joy of it, all the strength of it. We both have much to be sorry for, nothing to be ashamed of. In the future of our love, let us try to prove how proud we are of its past. Remember always that I shall live and die without regret for what was beyond us, only thanking God most humbly that you could love me at all. Good-by."

The door slowly opened, and Rufus, pale and bent from a sleepless night, stood on the threshold.

"Ah, here you are, Leonida," he said. "I have been looking all over for you. I want you to finish reading the legend to me, if you will. So, Geoffry, you haven't gone yet? I'm

afraid you will miss your train to town. Can't you wait over until to-morrow?"

Leonida rolled his chair forward and patted the cushions.

"Sit down," she answered gently; "you look tired. No, Geoffry can not stay. Of course I will read the end of the story. Give me the book."

She moved slowly to the window, the worn little volume in her hand, and stood looking back into the room. The sun, at its height of glory, streamed a golden path from behind her erect figure. Geoffry pressed his hand to his head, in uncontrollable pain, caught up his hat, and walked quickly over to the door. He turned and paused, with the knob in his hand, gazing at her over Rufus's shrunken form, between them in the great chair. For one moment their eyes met.

Then she began to read.

"And many years have passed over her head, and many storms. But he has not come to her again.

"She works diligently in the great garden, toiling in the roughest earth, and pricking herself sorely with thorns, until the blood runs. Her patch of soil is small, but there are many seeds planted in it, and the flowers are budding. Yet a red rose will never bloom there again——

"And sometimes, in the quiet night-time, when the day's work is over, she may still be seen, standing by the edge of the pool, looking into its unfathomable depths, and clasping to her breast a rose that is dead. . . ."

(1)

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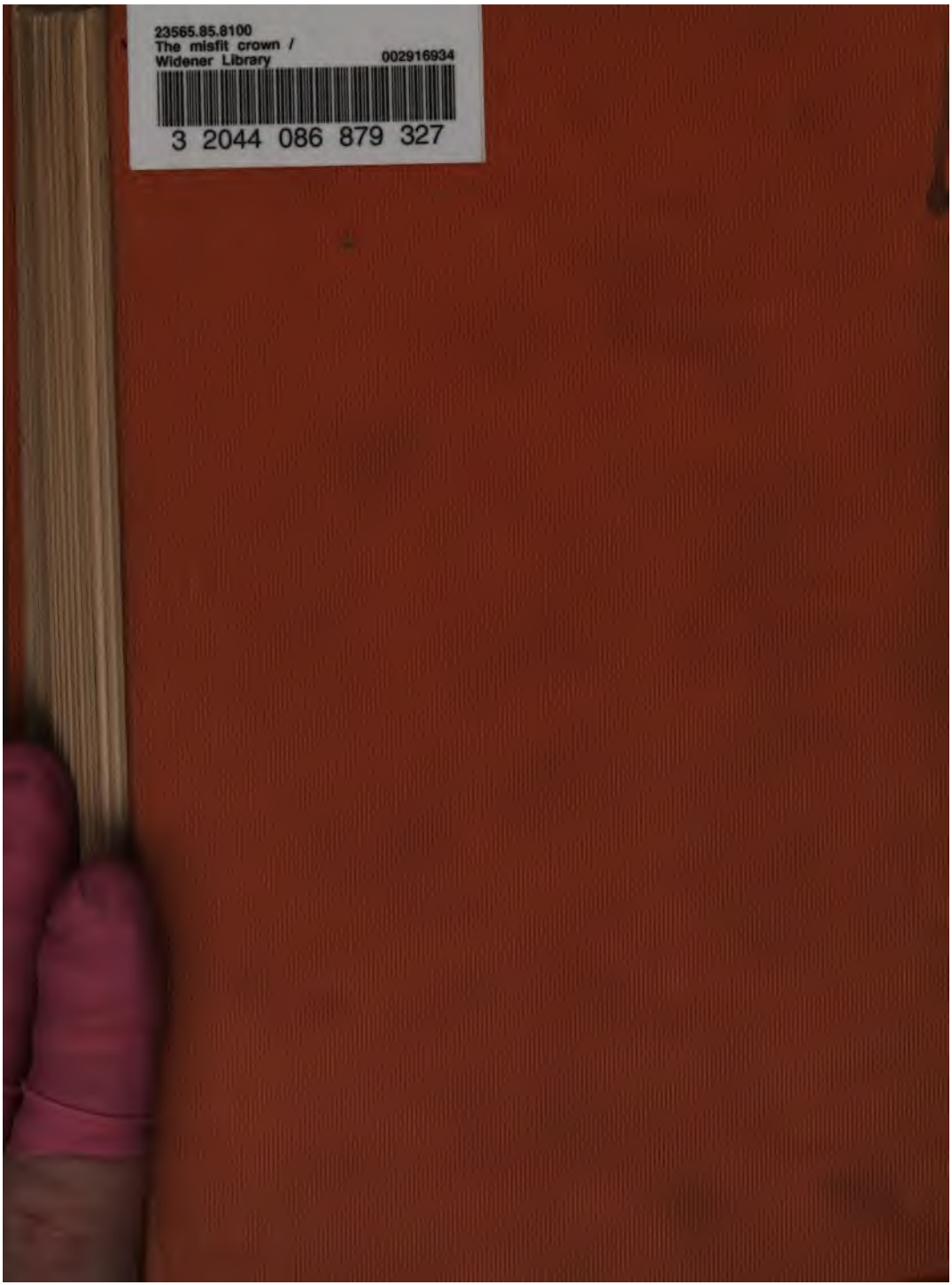
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